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UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO

Belonging, Believing, Being: A Journey Toward Social Justice

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts in Higher Education Leadership

by
Stacey Lynn Williams

Thesis Committee
Mary McDonald Ph.D., Chair
Cheryl Getz Ph.D., Member

2013

The Thesis of Stacey Lynn Williams is approved by:

Thesis Committee Chair

Thesis Committee Member

University of San Diego

San Diego

2013

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Stacey Lynn Williams

Dedicated to the Divine Mother whose energy and essence moves me toward Love,
just-Relationship, and connection to deep self.

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ABSTRACT

Using Participatory Action Research, this study examined the student and staff's experience of exploring social justice at the University of San Diego's Women's Center. Looking specifically at how the Center shaped the way that we understand and take up social justice, the inquiry examines our understanding and approach to our learning. Through artistic expression and dialogue, the research utilized a participatory approach that offers learning for both those interested justice and those committed to collaborative research models. I offer reflections about my own practice as an educator while sharing insights from participants in terms of the work of pursuing a deeper understanding of social justice. From this journey, we constructed a model of social justice learning, offering a container, pillars, and process to hold such exploration. The latter findings emerged with an intriguing connection to student development theory, offering insight to student affairs practitioners interested in social justice education.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Research Question

My research focused on the intersection of social justice education and emergent models of leadership and organizational theory. Traditionally, social justice education has done a lot in exploring multiple identities and structural oppression along those identities. Recent work in the field of leadership and organizational development looked to the process of creating organizational and/or cultural change through experiences that deepen how we as leaders relate to our diverse and changing world. I was interested in combining the two, creating space for students to become aware of oppressive structures and where they fall in them, while engaging with organizational processes that promote personal transformation. In pulling from social justice education and leadership theory, I hoped to address the three levels involved in social change: the individual, the group, and the societal (Komives & Wagner, 2009). Within this framework, I was particularly curious about the inner work necessary to realize change. To explore this, my initial Action Research question was: *How do we engage in justice-learning at the Women's Center?*

Context

My research looked specifically at the Women's Center at the University of San Diego. The Center serves to invite women to find voice, develop skills for transformation, and understand who they are called to be ("Women Center Web Site," n.d.). As the Graduate Assistant for the Women's Center, I oversaw the leadership programs for the Center and supported undergraduate students in their development and exploration of gender and gender-related issues. Even before I joined the Center, it was incredibly intentional in the way in which it came together, attempting to operate out of a collaborative space using consensus-based decision-making and reflection. With this, we had a strong leadership philosophy and approach that collectively pursued new ways of thinking and being as counter to the traditional, hierarchical systems that derive from patriarchal values. While our leadership program was robust and overlapped with the pursuit of social justice, a growth area for the Center was in better understanding our justice-learning. My hope for my action research project was to capture our learning around social justice and move it forward, creating language and methodology as explicit about social justice as we already were in terms of leadership. The vision and desire for this was already present; approaching our fourth year of a five-year strategic plan, the area needing the most attention was social justice education.

Key Terms

The research question evolved immensely as I developed my exploration by looking to the literature. Two key phrases in my question framed how I was thinking about my research going into it: (1) justice-learning and (2) engagement.

Justice-Learning. This phrase, offered by Butin (2007), conceptualizes how social justice education and experiential learning can complement one another in a common pursuit (i.e. learning about social justice). With this, the emphasis is placed on what the experience taught you about yourself and systems. Herzberg (1994) demonstrated how this plays out in the context of community-based learning when he offered that we must not merely have students tutoring in a literacy program, but exploring the structures that contribute to illiteracy; in fact, the latter must be the focal point of the experience. With learning organizations at the epicenter of the experiential piece for the Women's Center, the learning centered around what our organizational structures teach us about our social world and ourselves. For me, the phrase "justice-learning" is powerful for both its humility and its orientation to process. Rather than the intended "product" of social justice, justice-learning connotes an ongoing exploration and discovery_ honoring social justice work as a process as much as a goal (Patton, Shahjahan & Oesi-Kofi, 2010).

Engagement. Initially, my question read, "how do I improve justice-learning..." However, when I reflected on the way in which I approached my topic, I realized an inherent paradox in the framing of this question. As I spoke about *improving* the learning, I was viewing myself in a role of the beneficiary, imparting my "vast" knowledge to the students. With this, I was falling prey to what Freire (2000) aptly calls the "banking style" of education, where a teacher merely deposits information into students. This was counter to my understanding of social justice and perpetuated the same type of dominant-subordinate thinking I was attempting to disrupt (Jackson, 2008,

& Ellsworth, 1989). My movement to the language of “*engaging*” placed myself alongside my students in the process of defining, envisioning, and creating justice. Additionally, as this was participatory research, the question shifted from “I” to “we,” since in Participatory Action Research (PAR), the question is no longer merely about your own practice, but a group’s (Reason and Bradbury, 2008).

Significance

As we struggle to adequately respond to the worsening conditions in our world and create new structures within our increasingly globalized context, burgeoning the imaginative processes to create leaders for social justice is a crucial part of the needed shift in individuals, organizations, and social structures. This research sought to better understand how to cultivate such shifts in a student affairs context. In initiating this project, my hope was that, if we appropriately addressed our research question, we would be able to claim:

1. We engaged justice-learning at the Women’s Center.
2. We developed our understanding of social justice.
3. We created a pedagogical approach for justice-learning.

CHAPETR 2: LITERATURE AND THEORY

Literature Review

The literature that framed my research relied on the areas of: social justice education, critical pedagogy, and leadership and organizational change. In considering how we engage justice-learning at the Women's Center, I looked to the literature to (a) pursue a deeper understanding of social justice and (b) familiarize myself with emerging models of justice-learning. Implicit in both of these is a critique of traditional approaches to social justice pedagogy and community service-learning. This literature review captures my reading at the beginning of the action research process. Because action research evolves, so too did the body of literature I looked to; these later readings are embedded into my cycles, discussion, and implications.

Understanding Social Justice

The definition of social justice offered by Adams, Bell and Griffin (2007) informed my initial approach to the work. They wrote:

The goal of social justice education is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society that is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. (p. 1)

Social justice moves beyond the concepts of diversity and multiculturalism_ notions that promote awareness and tolerance_ to appreciation and action (Wall,

2007). With this, conversations are not about the “other,” but are about digging into our personal identities and how they shape our understanding and experience of oppression. This is done through a lens of intersectionality, pointing to the various ways that social identities interact to shape experiences of oppression, for example, how race and gender compound and/or protect your experience of oppression, making a White woman’s and woman of Color’s experiences quite different (Crenshaw, 1991). Black feminist hooks (1984) defined feminism as a movement to end sexist oppression, offering that this perspective “directs our attention to systems of domination and the inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class oppression” (p. 28). This understanding and approach to feminism is one rooted in the pursuit of social justice as a whole, making the aims and process parallel, if not synonymous.

This work requires intellectual knowledge and understanding of the social mechanisms used to maintain oppression, and also competency and commitment to understanding and un-rooting internal patterns of domination and subordination. Social justice, then, is a journey that transcends head knowledge of group and social dynamics, and calls for emotional and personal work of exploring one’s identity and how that plays out in interaction with the identity of others (Jun, 2010). Constantine et al. (2007) outlined nine social justice competencies for counseling practitioners:

1. Awareness of oppression and social inequities;
2. Ongoing self-reflection with regard to race, ethnicity, oppression, power, and privilege;

3. Awareness of the impact of a practitioner's power and privilege on clients, communities, and research participants;
4. Questioning, challenging, and intervening in inappropriate or exploitative intervention practices to promote well-being of affected individual or group;
5. Having and, when appropriate, sharing knowledge about indigenous practices;
6. Awareness of ongoing international social injustice;
7. Conceptualizing, implementing, and evaluating comprehensive intervention programs;
8. Collaboration with community organizations to provide culturally relevant service; and
9. Developing systematic intervention and advocacy skills for social change. (p. 25-29)

While these vary slightly outside of a counseling setting, the basic notions of the competencies connects to the role of a social justice educator. Overall, the literature points to three overriding concepts that support internalizing social justice: non-duality and complexity, process orientation, and liberation.

Non-duality & complexity. Jun (2010) posited that hierarchical and dichotomous thinking creates the constructions that lead to injustice. The base of this lies within cognitive structures that create boundaries creating social distinctions, which then lead to stereotypes and favoring of members of particular groups (Fiske & Lindzey, 2004 &

Fiske et al., 2002). Thus, a primary task in social justice is uprooting our mental schemas and moving toward nonhierarchical thinking.

This complexity moves into our notions of what social justice is in and of itself. As depicted in Figure 1, North (2006) provided a framework when analyzing multiple perspectives on the concept of social justice that holds the seemingly contradictory theories of redistribution/recognition, micro/macro, and sameness/difference, arguing that these “dichotomies” are actually multi-directional, intersecting spheres which must all be held to bring a more just vision of society into our minds and subsequent ways of being.

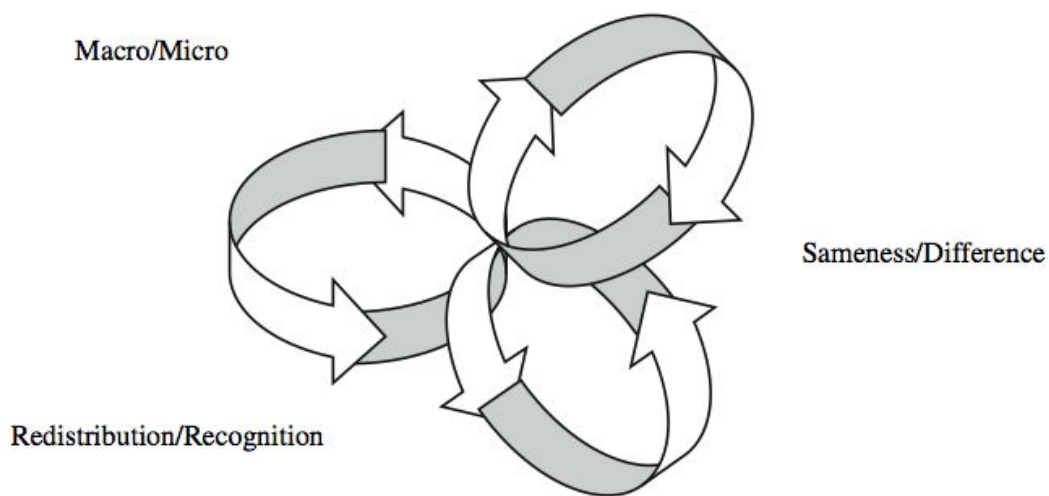


Figure 1: North's (2006) Framework of the Three Spheres of Social Justice

Synthesizing multiple submissions of scholars' understanding of social justice, Patton, Shahjahan & Oesi-Kofi (2010) similarly argued for attending to multiple perspectives of justice. They proposed that, in being attentive to distributive,

recognition, and relational justice, you can evaluate institutional processes and societal patterns that create imbalance of power. Holding this complexity as a social justice educator, Butin (2007) found that the process of undercutting dualistic ways of thinking was a critical aspect of actualizing sustainable change.

Process orientation. Many authors emphasized that social justice is not simply an aim, but a process. Patton, Shahjahan & Osei-Kofi (2010) argued that, “social justice is not a fixed target, but a complex and evolving vision, dependent on context, groups, and systems that oppress” (p. 270). This complex and evolving vision is a reference to the need for undercutting duality and unlearning social hierarchies, which are often implicit and subconscious (Massey, 2007). Collins and Pieterse (2007) suggested that this perspective of social justice as a process “requires a daily choice to engage issues of race and culture internally and externally,” while emphasizing the ongoing effort required (p.15). In viewing social justice as a process, many scholars emphasized a new way of seeing and understanding both social dynamics and internal patterns as integral to the pursuit of justice. Much of this process is about integrating cognition and emotion, understanding relationship on both a systemic and personal level (Adams, Bell and Griffin, 2007).

Liberation. The aim of complicating our thinking patterns through the process of unlearning socialized ways of being is *liberation* from systems that oppress (Freire, 2000). Many disciplines touching upon social justice_ from theology, philosophy, psychology, ethics, education, and leadership_ coalesce around the notion of being freed or expanding beyond current structures. Love (2010) described this process as

developing a “liberatory consciousness.” A liberatory consciousness enables humans to live with an awareness of the dynamics of oppression, prompting analysis and action so that one begins to live “outside” the patterns of thought and behavior learned through socialization. As Freire (2000) said,

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (p. 14)

Emerging Models

There are many ways to cultivate this praxis of complexity, process, and liberation. The literature provided ample examples of this pursuit, which I organized around the ideas of consciousness-raising, cultivating social imagination, creative organizing, and leadership development.

Consciousness-raising. Scholars encouraged new ways of seeing and observing situations and the structures that create them, calling attention to how we are shaped by external forces, a practice that feminist coined as “consciousness-raising (hooks, 2000). To bring this new consciousness into mind, Welch (2002) advocated using feminist object-relations theory, cultivating the ability to recognize others as subjects whose lives both overlap and exceed one’s own (p. 248). This perspective provides a construction of mutuality. The idea of mutuality, or learning to see the construction of the “other” is prominent in literature about social justice. Himley (2004) came to an

understanding of mutuality that holds the complexity of intersectionality and offered that composing mutuality requires an “interplay of noise,” an analysis using both proximity and distance to uncover the social conditions creating categories of strangeness between people based on social identities. Consciousness-raising facilitates, then, relationships that undo constructions of strangeness, while also supports and challenges people to uncover the power dynamics shaping their lived experience. Others named this practice “reinventing consciousness,” historicizing and calling into question exclusionary forces (North, 2006). Because of this, there is a prominent theme in social justice education of rooting the learning in students’ lived experience. Using a model of liberatory consciousness, Briggs (2011) highlighted the use of storytelling in justice-learning. She outlined many types of stories, pushing for the deepest: transforming stories, generating constructions that are catalysts for change. Other authors caution the use of story-telling. Applebaum (2008) urged educators to focus on how experience is shaped by social frameworks and ideologies, so that students place their stories into broader social and cultural contexts, revealing systems of oppression and complicity in them.

A true tension in social justice education is in promoting structures where everyone’s voice is valued and heard while being situated in a context where students of privilege are accustomed to their dominance. The literature divides here as to how to engage the voices of more privileged students; some look to redistribution by privileging the voices of students with more marginalized identities (Boler, 2004), while others warn against the silencing of white male voices as the antithesis of the visioning for a

new world (Jackson, 2008). Using North's (2006) image of the multi-dimensional and intersecting spheres, coupled with intersectionality theory of third wave feminism, some offer that storytelling is essential and must be explored in a way that abolishes oppressed-oppressor relationships and restores both the oppressed and oppressors to their full subjectivity (Zimmerman, McDermott, & Gould, 2009). In all of this, the pursuit of social justice hinges on one's growing ability to see the injustice around you, an ability often supported by consciousness-raising groups or practices.

Cultivating social imagination. While consciousness-raising is about noticing what is occurring (and the forces that make it so), social imagination looks to what *could* occur. This imagination is an awareness of the human world as "a common historical project," not simply a state of nature to which we must adjust ourselves (Herzberg, 1994). With this perspective, the heart of social imagination is ushering in a new tomorrow; as Love (2010) said, "systems do not perpetuate themselves, they are perpetuated by the actions of people who act automatically on the basis of their socialization" (p. 603). Conversely, systems can be recreated through the actions of people. Leadership theorist Wheatley (2001) drew a parallel of this co-creative potential to the process we observe in nature. She reminded readers that, in natural cycles, change occurs through many local actions occurring simultaneously, and proposed that humans are no exception; many individuals' beckoning of a new tomorrow can coalesce and evolve, creating social progress. It is here that Freire's (2000) emphasis on *praxis*—the relationship between thought or belief and conscious social action is illuminated; in coming to problematize current structures (consciousness-raising) and envision a more

just social order (social imagination), one grows in action *and* behavior to move society toward the new vision, creating the critical mass to which Wheatley alludes.

Creative organizing. Many scholars encouraged a case-in-point pedagogy that uses the group dynamics in the classroom to illuminate the power dynamics in the world, and transcend them by using categories such as race, class, and gender as areas of connection (Collins, 2009). With this, Butin (2007) promoted the use of dialogue and relationships to make the contingency of our situations visible, so to [begin to] unlearn oppressive assumptions. Group-work not only surfaces oppressive myths, but can also provide alternative images of ways of organizing, facilitating some of the work of social imagination. In a gathering named the “unconference,” feminist social workers LaPointe, Mehrotra, & O’Brien (2011) illuminated the role of process and space. They put forth that “how we do the work is the work itself,” sharing that the openness of the unconference created a space that challenged the notions of more traditional approaches to conferences and reflected the possibilities of new ways of coming together (p.352). There is a powerful tie here to the literature on learning organizations. Senge (1994b) defined a learning organization as “organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together” (p. 3). Additionally, Scharmer’s (2009) theory on learning organizations, which called us to deepen the way in which we make connections and co-create a future, seemed particularly salient to me in thinking about justice, particularly in his call toward an open mind, open heart, and

open will. In all this this, the research on learning organizations provided a framework for creating space to simultaneously unlock a vision for and realize social justice in an organizational context.

Leadership development. Along this vein, leadership development speaks to the ways in which we develop people's capacity to create social change (i.e. practice leadership). This understanding of leadership is informed primarily by Heifetz & Linsky's (2002) work around adaptive leadership and Komives & Wagner's (2009) social change model of leadership development.

Adaptive Leadership. Heifetz & Linsky (2002) explained the distinction between technical and adaptive challenges, with the latter being issues or problems that require people to change the way they think, see, and behave. Leadership, then, is exercised when we mobilize people around needed change. Social justice is certainly an adaptive challenge_ this perspective of leadership and the subsequent strategies in mobilizing people informed my cycles as I thought about my changed action as *interventions*.

Social Change Model. The Social Change Model of Leadership Development is based on college students' development in terms of their engagement with the notion of leadership for the purpose of positive social change. With this, Komives & Wagner (2009) outlined the "seven C's"_ areas of study and attention that promotes awareness, understanding, and embracing of leadership for change. These "C's" fall on the individual, group, and social levels, addressing social change at and within all three. These levels, as well as the attention to the C's: consciousness of self, congruence

commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, and citizenship, shaped my approach to the research.

Connections

There are a variety of frameworks and perspectives on engaging social justice. As outlined, the main bodies of literature informing my work were social justice education, community-based learning, and leadership development for social change. The latter is perhaps the most influential to me. I was really intrigued by the inner nature of social justice and the necessity of self-work in social change. To the extent that our constructions of people perpetuate power and dominance, we are complicit in systems of oppression. In my own life, I have found that the root of social justice work—or social transformation—is in my personal transformation. Thus, my study and practice of leadership development greatly informed my research. In defining social justice as complex and evolving, with its actualization hinging on creative visioning, a co-creative approach to the exploration of justice seemed most fitting. As I began my research, I saw dialogue and organizational processes as crucial pieces in our reimagining of the world.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Methods

As I mentioned, my research used Participatory Action Research (PAR), relying heavily on McNiff and Whitehead (2011) to inform the design and structure of the work. Action research is distinctive in that it views researchers as a part of the context they are investigating. It places the researcher central to the question by inquiring into one's own practice through action-reflection cycles. Using a participatory model, the research design, investigative process, and derived theory comes from the community, as opposed to an outside source or the researcher exclusively. Reason and Bradbury (2008) described action research as more of an orientation to inquiry than a methodology, with its focus being on democratizing the research process. Action research is a movement toward social justice in and of itself, as it bridges the researcher-practitioner divide and empowers communities to view themselves as knowledge-creators. Using this model in an explicitly feminist space opens up opportunities to surface power-dynamics within the research and community, as well as explore counter practices in terms of representing data (Reid & Frisby, 2008). Thus, the research relied on reflexive, dialogic, and artistic forms of data and representation.

Partners

Research participants were all affiliated with the Women's Center since the research question was situated in the Center. In addition to these partners, action taken within early cycles included other on-campus departments.

Women's Center

My main research partners were the students at the Center, as well as my supervisor, the Women's Center Director. Throughout the research, the Center had nine undergraduate student workers, five Leadership Council members (undergraduate students), four sustained volunteers (undergraduate students), one full-time staff person (the director), and one part-time graduate assistant (me). In terms of the research, when I say "we," I am referring to this group of 20 participants. The research was a shared journey of inquiry, program design, implementation, evaluation, and reflection. My intention was for all aspects of the research to be participatory, thus shared amongst the Center partners (students and staff). This was made possible because of the structure and leadership philosophy of the Center. In fact, Action Research complemented the work of the Center in its pursuit of collaboration.

On campus departments

Our main partners were the other centers and spaces that are rooted in the common value of social justice on campus, particularly other offices and departments engaged in working with students to explore social justice. Specifically, we partnered with the

Center for Awareness, Service, and Action (CASA) and the United Front Multicultural Center (UFMVC), both of whom had an existing partnership with the Women's Center.

CASA. Prior to beginning the research, CASA and the Women's Center were engaging in dialogue and visioning about how to strengthen our connection. The research continued this exploration.

UFMC. The UFMC was the most accessible partner because we have neighboring spaces and are under the same university division (Student Affairs). In this, there is an expectation written into our job descriptions that we collaborate. More important than these logistical connections, the UFMC spends a significant amount of time on social justice education and identity exploration.

Both CASA and UFMC were natural partners because of the alignment between our visions, ethos, and learning outcomes. Additionally, these two spaces had overlap with the Women's Center in the students involved. While my research did not explore this, it would be interesting to apply the findings to see how it connects and differs to the experiences of students in CASA and the UFMC.

Design

Given the action-reflection framework, the research relied on existing methods of education and learning in the Center. Additionally, it embedded specific practices into each cycle that served as the platform for inquiry and data collection.

Existing Practices

My work at the Women's Center incorporated the pursuit of justice-learning in many areas. Before the research began, justice-learning was already a focus within training and orientation, group reflections, departmental partnerships, program planning, and individual advising sessions. These areas of my job served as the starting place for investigating my personal practice and the collective experience at the Center.

Research Platform

Our exploration occurred through cycles of reflection, vision, dialogue, and expression. While these four are all action that was taken within each cycle, as a whole they also framed the research and were the means through which we undertook our co-exploration. Thus, it is through reflection, vision, dialogue, and expression that we explored the question, *how do we engage justice-learning at the Women's Center*. Because of this, I offer the theoretical foundation for these here and explore each aspect further throughout my description and reflection on our cycles.

Reflection. The research created a lot of space for reflection, beginning each cycle with something to consider and providing time in silence to think about the question(s) posed. This approach was an existing practice of the Women's Center and formed the foundation of learning based upon literature on student development theory. In student affairs work, the role of advisors is to facilitate experiences for students to *make meaning* of their values and beliefs, sense of self, and overall identity. This is done primarily through the notion of challenge and support__ providing an appropriate balance of validating students' learning and place, and pushing them to progress along developmental lines (Sanford, 1967). Providing space for reflection is a

primary vehicle in supporting students' development, as it serves to hold up a mirror to themselves, prompting them to begin to develop an internal foundation fostered through a reflective stance on one's life (Evans et al., 1998). In addition to the lens of development theory, the questions we used were crafted through a method known as "questions in service of the asked." These types of questions serve, not the person posing them, but the one reflecting on their response, as they provide opportunity for perspective shifting, self-understanding and/or greater awareness (Herzig & Chason, 2006 and Chakraverti & Sarrouf, 2012, March 8-10).

Vision. Based on the literature around fostering a social imagination, another core component of the research was to encourage visioning. Thus, within every cycle, we had time for students to not only reflect, but also *vision*. This was an aspect woven into our research design by blending liberation pedagogy with work around learning organizations. Relying on Freire (2000) and hooks (2003), we held visioning as a piece of the liberatory approach to social justice, looking to what could be__ who we could be__ when unbound by systems that oppress. The other aspect of visioning was rooted in the literature around learning organizations. Senge (1994a) discussed the importance of developing a shared vision through a process where everyone contributes and individual visions are embedded into the shared image. He reminded leaders that visions are fluid and always evolving, and offered that they are fostered by first viewing organizations as a set of overlapping communities. It is through this lens that I thought about the role of visioning within the research.

Dialogue. Bohm (2004) distinguished between *discussion*_whose roots literally translate to smashing together_ and *dialogue*, which he translated from the Latin roots to “a stream of meaning flowing through” (p. 7). With this, dialogue is framed in a way that fosters people to hear one another and gain a greater understanding of the whole in a way that *generates* deeper knowledge and connection. In the research, I approached dialogue from a Bohmian understanding of the practice, hoping to not only create new mental structures from a liberated “*conscientizacao*” as Freire (2000) identified it, but move from *conscientizacao* to new ways of being and seeing in the world (new meaning). With this intention, the work of Isaacs (1999) informed how we shaped our dialogue, as the wisdom he offered on facilitating provided pieces around the the practical application of Bohm. Leadership theorist Wheatley (2002) wrote about the significance of *conversation* as an important aspect to cultivate change saying “If we can sit together and talk about what’s important to us, we begin to come alive” (p.3). She named these parameters for conversation [dialogue], which framed my approach to creating space:

1. We acknowledge one another as equals
2. We try to stay curious about each other
3. We recognize that we need each other’s help to become better listeners
4. We slow down so we have time to think and reflect
5. We remember that conversation is the natural way humans think together
6. We expect it to be messy at times. (p. 29)

Expression. Finally, in every stage of the research, we utilized artistic expression. With this, we utilized a variety of mediums to explore and represent our visioning and shared experience. We embraced creative expression and art in the research to: (1) access our imagination and creative thought and (2) open up ways of communication that go beyond the means privileged by dominant norms. As hooks (1994) said, “the function of art is to do more than tell it like it is—it’s to imagine what is possible” (ch. 19). Thus, a piece of my intention in incorporating creative expression into the work was to facilitate the visioning piece mentioned above. Additionally, creative expression played with what Reid and Frisby (2008) call “counter practices.” In this, they urged feminist researchers to test the boundaries of prescribed ways of research and representation. I approached my research with a personal interest in art and curiosity in how it might be included as data, creating space for voices and representation that have previously been excluded from academia (Frisby, Maguire, & Reid, 2009).

Data Collection

I used four primary forms of documentation to create and collect data:

- **Personal Journaling.** To capture my own learning, observation, and experiences throughout the research, I maintained a personal journal reflecting on formal interventions and action that I took. In addition to the reflections, I journaled periodically with images and mind maps of how I understood social justice to chart my own progression throughout the process.
- **Artistic Representation.** To capture the progression of my and students’ definitions of social justice, we created individual visual representations of our

vision for social justice early on and returned to them later in the research. We dialogued about what changed in our visions, why that change occurred, and what experiences contributed to the shift.

- **Shared Note Taking.** Beginning in cycle two, we used shared note taking to include all voices, collectively recording the learning and themes from the discussions, trainings, and dialogues. With this, at meetings and events that addressed justice-learning, everyone captured the learning and themes that stood out to them and I collected their notes.
- **Focus Group Notes.** For the final cycle, I held several focus groups to test my representation of our findings. These sessions were documented with minutes to capture the findings and comments of students.

Trustworthiness

Accuracy. The research design inherently ensured validation in its collaborative approach. I did not come to conclusions on my own, but participants drew conclusions and then we tested, validated, and critiqued the claims together. We collectively analyzed the progression of our shared notes and conversation over the research period, pulling out the themes in a grounded fashion. To test my conclusions, I took the model back to students in four small focus groups and had a dialogue to explore the extent to which my representation of the findings reflected their experience.

Triangulation. To invite critique and examination of my research process and findings, I vetted the research through a validation group comprised of student affairs practitioners, faculty, students, and colleagues who scrutinized the evidence and

ensured that the claims were supported and coherent. The validation group's process mirrored that of the research, using shared note taking and dialogue as the primary means of exploration. After adjusting my findings based on the focus groups, I took the revised model to my validation group where we critiqued it and compared it to our parallel work as a validation group. What I share below is the cumulative picture from my initial analysis, the students' input, and the validation group's modifications.

CHAPTER 4: ACTION-REFLECTION CYCLES

Introduction

When I began this exploration, I brought with me a commitment to social justice, a growing understanding of what that means, and a desire to more clearly articulate how my values of justice inform my practice. As I turned to the literature, my understanding of social justice became less concrete while I faced the complexity of the topic, how little I knew, and how limited the social imagination is in terms of dreaming of a world yet to come. This humbled disposition drove my questions and my curiosity as I sought to discover how we envision a socially just world.

As I explained in the methods section, my research was organized in action-reflection cycles—that is, taking a specific action or set of actions and noticing what was happening in myself and in the organization as a result. Using a participatory model, much of the action I took was to open up the reflection to the students and staff

to explore what they too were noticing. The movement between each cycle was fluid and undefined as we engaged in the research. I later delineated the cycles based on when our reflection led to a change in my practice and the action I took. Within each cycle, I will share what we learned along two lines: (1) the process of social justice education and (2) my practice as a social justice educator.

As I share our experience, I will offer a model for creating a space to engage social justice. What I offer was born out of a meta-analysis of shared notes from each research cycle. I coded themes from all of the shared notes and created a mind map of the themes with each cycle layered over one another (see Appendix A). Using this mind map, the 3 B's emerged—Belonging, Believing, and Being—as the central process in learning about social justice (see Figure 2).

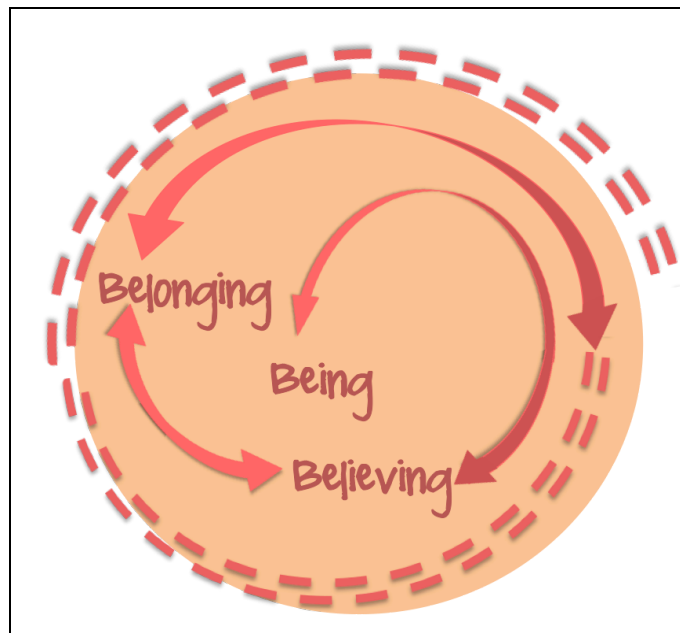


Figure 2: Stages of Social Justice Learning. This image shows the stages of social justice learning that emerged.

This transformational process rests upon the pillars of our approach to social justice, explained in cycle one. The implications on my practice will be explored in detail in the following chapters and are captured by the call to *invite*, *inquire*, and *ignite*. This journey of action and changes in practice will be embedded into the model and process as we progress through my analysis.

An interesting aspect of the research is that the methodology became a part of the learning process. Thus, the cycles of reflection, visioning, dialogue, and expression created the container_ what Kegan (1998) called a holding environment_ in which the model is situated (Heifetz, 1994 & Parks, 2005). What was found cannot be directly correlated to this backdrop, yet the points of connection will be explored throughout my writing.

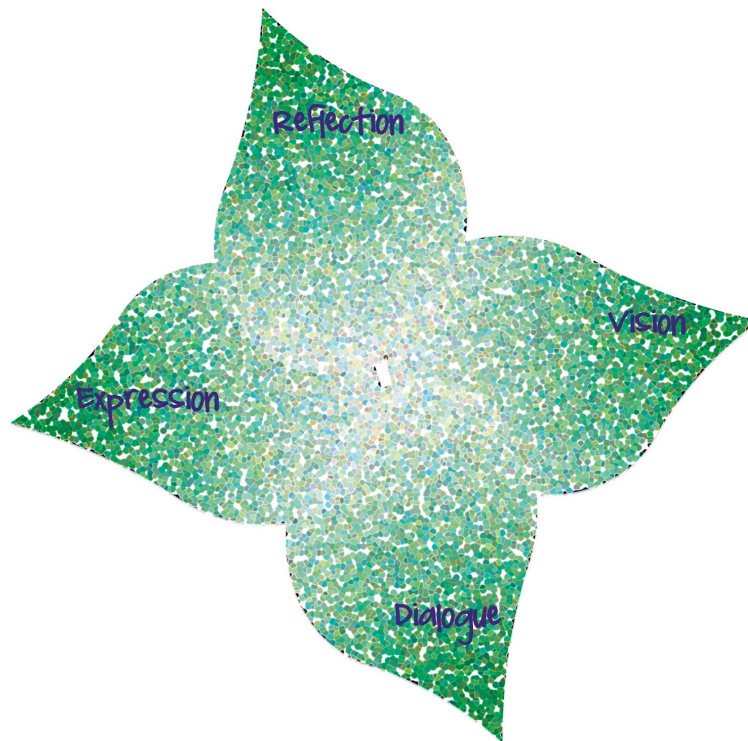


Figure 3: Container for Justice Learning. This image shows the container in which the research was embedded.

Following our journey through the cycles, I will zoom out on larger themes of the model and their connection to existing literature. Before we begin, I have one caveat: I do not believe there is a formula or single way to engage this work. I offer this model not as a prescriptive equation, but as a starting point for thinking about the components necessary to create a space of learning and growth around social justice. When I asked the students what *must* be captured as I wrote about our experience, one of the things they continually returned to is that it cannot fully be shared; they urged me to be explicit in saying that it is not possible to capture the beauty or power of what we experienced throughout our research. Just as our words limit us in envisioning a socially just world, they limit our ability to convey the glimpses of that world when we see it amidst us. What I hope to offer is inquiry into what *could be* for Women's Centers, universities, organizations, and any space of learning. If reading this gives you anything, my hope_ our hope_ is that it allows you to be free to dream BIG. We wish for you to create, to laugh, and to connect, for what the world needs is structures that allow us and encourage us to be our authentic selves. As Palmer (2000) noted:

We arrive in this world with birthright gifts_ then we spend the first half of our lives abandoning or letting others disabuse us of them. As young people, we are surrounded by expectations that may have little to do with who we really are, expectations held by people that are not trying to discern our selfhood but to fit us into slots. In families, schools, workplaces, and religious communities, we are

trained away from true self toward images of acceptability; under social pressures like racism and sexism our original shape is deformed beyond recognition; and we ourselves, driven by fear, too often betray true self to gain the approval of others. (p.12)

The story shared below is how we discovered to shake these powers and find our selfhood and voice throughout our journey of social justice learning.

Cycle One: Pillars of Social Justice Learning

Action

My research began by continuing the work that the Women's Center already did in terms of engaging social justice. Three pillars capture this: identity exploration, reflecting on values, and addressing issues (see figure 4). I tried to explain how we engaged in all three pillars independently, but we interweave the three throughout every activity and undertaking. Instead, I will explore our use of the pillars in cycle one through our trainings, gathering, and partnering.



Figure 4: Process of Social Justice Learning. This shows the pillars that fuel the process of social justice learning.

Training. The Women's Center training might be better named a retreat. In addition to building community amongst the women and intentionally carving out time to spend together, we engaged in all three pillars. We took time for reflection, asking people to write and then share out around a topic-specific question. For fall training, we asked students what was one thing they saw or did over the summer that made them think of the Women's Center. A predominate theme in response to this question was situations or events that point to sexism alive in our world. Additionally, we used identity exploration activities to make sense of our lived experiences through our ascribed social identities. With this, we looked at our race(s), class, sexual orientation, gender, ability, religion, and other identities and explored how they impacted our lives,

experience of marginalization and privilege, and overall sense of the world and its problems. We also brought in educational components to raise awareness of issues that disproportionately impact women. For cycle one, this included assigning a book to read over the summer, *Unlikely Allies in the Academy: Women of Color and White women in Conversation*, which explored the difficulty White women and women of Color experience in connecting across races (Dace, 2012). We then had a discussion on the reading during our training. Another educational aspect we facilitated was asking a faculty member to come in to speak on the history of feminism in the United States.

Gathering. In every meeting, we posed a reflection question and created time to journal and then dialogue about our responses. The questions varied depending on what programs the Center had coming up, what issues or topics rose in the news or in the Center, and what the students were talking about in their one-on-one advising meetings. A large part of cycle one included tracking these questions, paying attention to what was going on during the reflections, and seeing how the questions connected to larger conversations about social justice.

Partnering. Another way that the Center facilitated reflection, addressed issues, and engaged in identity exploration is through its partnerships. In cycle one, we partnered with the Center for Awareness, Service, and Action (CASA) and brought students together to explore the concept of social justice using the quote from an aboriginal Australian woman, *“if you have come to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up in mine, then let us work together”* as a starting place for the ideas of intersectionality and interconnectedness.

We asked students to create an artistic representation of this quote in groups in silence and then discussed what that process brought up for us and how it connects to the notion of social justice (see Appendix B). Additionally, we came together with the United Front Multicultural Center (UFMC) for a day at Cabrillo National Monument to hike and form relationships, while also discussing the implications of the history of a site like Cabrillo (the place where European explorers “discovered” the West Coast) on both Centers, particularly given the fact that our university is located on what used to be native land.

My Practice

While my research design spoke of using power-sharing and co-creation of theory, much of my learning in the first cycle centered on the ways that I did not live up to this ideal. The use and construction of power was a clear theme throughout my research, which manifested itself in multiple areas of the process. Throughout cycle one, I reflected on my own power in terms of my control of the research process, concept of the students, how I carried and used my authority, and the way larger systems of power impacted the community.

Control. Initially thinking of my first cycle as a sort of needs assessment, I thought I would interview the students and staff to ask how we currently understood social justice and what we thought would improve the Women’s Center’s approach to our learning. I quickly realized that this method was not a shared experience, as I was positioning myself as the keeper of knowledge. By having individual interviews, students were not sharing their experiences with others, nor hearing the perspectives of one

another. While I had begun to ask, “How do we,” I was not creating space for the students to experience the “we.” With this realization, I ended the pre-interviews and we moved to a design that used group dialogue within every cycle. Especially in the context of student-advisor relationships, embracing the “we” is a tricky process, and can even pose ethical dilemmas. For example, as the supervisor of some of the students, how voluntary did the research feel to them? Did they feel like they had the space and choice to decline participating? And, when most action taken was embedded into the work and life of the Center, how clear were the boundaries for those disinterested in participating? Both the formal and implicit power dynamics made shared-ownership a complex web to navigate. This was further complicated by the fact that I was not only the principle investigator, but was completing action research as a requirement for my degree. Thus, if no “we” had surfaced in terms of participant interest, I would have shifted to an “I” question and conducted research on my own practice in the same Center context. These realities made it even easier for me to fall into the trap of thinking of the project as “mine.”

Concept of students. An important piece of avoiding the traps or pitfalls of power-hoarding was to critically examine how I was viewing the students and their knowledge. Throughout the first cycle, I found myself often thinking of my students as mere repositories of information_ relying still on the “banking model” of education (Freire, 2000). With this, I saw it as my role to impart my understanding of social justice onto them. This is evident in the training development for the fall, where I created the outline and topics for the entire program, as well as chose the book we read, selected

the speakers, and wrote all of the reflection questions. Perhaps where this became most evident was in planning the joint exploration with CASA. As we met to plan the time together, I developed a long list of values to center the introductory activity around. A validation group member reminded me of this inconsistency before the training, asking why I had prescribed the values rather than asked the students to come up with their own. Instead of organizing the exercise around my own associations of social justice, we began by asking the students to co-construct a list of their values connected to social justice (see Appendix C). From there, we could explore not just my ideas but also the group's. While this may seem small, the implications ripple out into the level of ownership the students had in the research process; I realized that shifting the way I viewed the students simultaneously shifted how I engaged them in the research, and how they viewed themselves.

Carrying my authority. Even as I began to deconstruct my own notions of power, it took careful and daily attention to how I carried myself and used my authority, given the formal position I am in with the students. Early on in cycle one, we had a discussion following one of the reflection questions and I began to see a theory from my literature come alive in the group dynamic. I became really excited about this connection and began explaining the theory to them. I eagerly jumped up and was drawing the theory on the board when I realized that I had again placed myself in a traditional lecturer-student position. This incident was seemingly innocent, in that my behavior came from my excitement about a connection I was making more so than a hierarchical view of the students. Nonetheless, I used my position of authority to take control and

disturb the collective experience that had been going on before my interruption. While there may be instances that using this teacher voice is indeed beneficial, I became aware throughout my first cycle how frequently I go there without intention. Thus, being mindful of my use and exertion of power became a significant growth edge for me.

Our Process

This needed mindfulness was not only specific to me, but became an important aspect of engaging social justice learning for the group as a whole. For example, one White woman became aware of the way that she came to the rescue of another White woman when she made an unintentionally racist comment to other students one day. When this person came to me with concerns about her behavior and how to address it, we decided to create a space for people to acknowledge microaggressions _ aversive isms often perpetuated with subtlety _ and other racial dynamics within the Center (DeAngellis, 2009 & Sue et al., 2007). At the next Center meeting, we posed the question, *“How have you seen the dynamics described in Unlikely Allies played out in the Center?”* This opened up a healthy conversation where we shared our experiences of feeling like perpetrators and/or recipients of microaggressions with one another. One student closed by saying, “[From this dialogue], I gained an awareness of my action and comments as they contribute to racism and am beginning to acknowledge my privilege within the context of the Women’s Center itself.”

With this, it became clear that there is actually a fourth pillar: noticing power. As we engage in the three pillars of identity exploration, reflection on values, and

addressing issues, it is also important to keep an eye on the power in the room and how our social identities shape the way the group comes together. Batliwala (2011) posited that feminist organizations must challenge visible, hidden, and invisible power wherever it operates and seek organizational structures that provide alternative models that make the practice of power, whenever possible, visible, democratic, accountable, and distributed.

This summer, I attended the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE) with a group of our students. It allowed me to explore my white privilege in deeper ways than I had previously (also leading us to the book *Unlikely Allies*). Since that time, race is a more salient identity for me. This dialogue was important learning for me in really collectively raising dynamics I was increasingly aware of, but uncertain how to engage. Creating a space to notice power opened up the opportunity to do so elsewhere. Since this dialogue, within my one-on-ones, the students and I frequently explored how our race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status impacted the Center's relationships. Thus, the pillars of social justice learning are actually are four, with noticing power as the final component of the foundation of exploring social justice (see Figure 5).

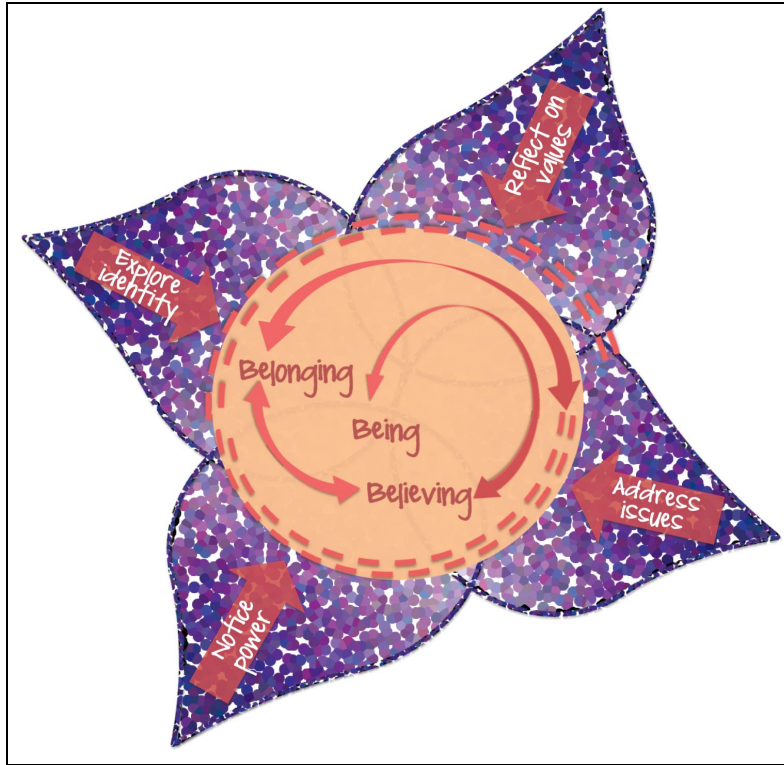


Figure 5: Revised Process of Justice-Learning. This image shows the additional pillar of social justice learning.

Reflection-to-Action: Inviting

Noticing power became the most prominent theme from cycle one within my personal reflection and growth as a practitioner. Essentially, I needed to look at the quote we used from training: *“If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up in mine, then let us work together,”* and remember that this is true too in how I approach and view the students. The message parallels how I needed to shift my understanding of my role at the Center. As an advisor, I am not there to “help” students figure something out that I already “get.” Instead, we are co-explorers, with our learning and growth inextricably bound. I needed to view my students as knowledge-holders, and frame the research in a way that honored that role

and voice. Thus, the shift in my initial cycle required me to move from a practice of power-hoarding to one of power-sharing, *inviting* students into the research process and role of knowledge-holder and creator. As a supervisor, advisor, and instructor to most of the participants in the research, a sub-question became: *how do I engage my students as full contributors to_ and authors of_ the research, and their learning?* This question and aim of maintaining an invitational practice would be carried through the future cycles of my research.

The action in cycle one, including the attention to power, is all informed by the literature on social justice education and is covered in fairly traditional models and practices. However, what follows is less addressed in literature: it looks at the collective and developmental processes that created space for social justice to be understood and enacted.

Cycle Two: Belonging

Action

For the second cycle, I wanted to grasp our starting place in terms of how we individually and collectively would answer the question: *What is social justice*. We had engaged in the pillars, but we had not explicitly looked at social justice_ the overriding concept that is the reason for digging into each pillar. Given my learning and reflection on power, I also wanted to inquire in a way that created space for everyone to learn from one another. When we gathered for our next staff meeting, I posed the questions: *What is your vision of social justice? And, when you think of a socially just world, what*

do you see? Appendix D shows some of the personal visions that the students created. Once everyone created their visions, we each had time to share our art and then we dialogued about the collective picture between and amongst everyone's personal visions. For everyone to contribute to capturing data, we drew the words, images, and phrases that stood out, the patterns we heard, and what further reflection other people's sharing inspired as we dialogued (see Appendix F). This practice of shared note taking was one way of inviting students into the research process, as we literally created a collective picture of each dialogue (which was then the foundation to explore on a meta-level themes and findings). This de-centralized data collection process moved us closer to participatory theorizing. The cycle continued by asking similar questions within one-on-ones, looking at the world, values, and ideas students wished to see realized. Additionally, at a meeting soon after, we asked *what is the value of the Women's Center on campus?* Using a method from my classes known as "chalk talk," students responded to the question on a large piece of butcher paper, writing their responses and making a giant mind map where they connected one another's ideas.

Our Process

Something that was very clarifying during this research cycle was seeing more of the students' reason for being involved at the Center. For many of them, their sense of what brought them to the Center and the value of it in their life came from finding a sense of community. For about half of the students, they were engaged in social justice in other areas of their life—albeit studying Ethnic Studies, Sociology, or Political Science, or involvement in multicultural organizations, University Ministry justice-related

experiential opportunities, or CASA's programs. These students came in with a more clearly articulated understanding of the concepts of social justice and found the Center to be a space where people shared their ideas, perspectives, sentiments, and social critique. For others, they came to the Center through a specific program that made them feel connected to a community (primarily the women's leadership retreat, first year women program, and women of Color discussion group). These students did not always have the same level of exposure to or awareness of social problems or issues related to gender, and did not necessarily come to the Center for this piece as much as to be known. Both groups_ regardless of their level of exposure and interest in social justice_reported placing and valuing their experience of friendship and solidarity as paramount to engaging and addressing issues. This was evident when we did the chalk talk activity_ before any specific issues or educational purposes were written, there were several notes on the community, friendship, and experience of solidarity. In many ways, this was quite intentional on my supervisor's and my part, as well as the Graduate Assistants before me. As a feminist organization, we attempted to come together in ways that are congruent with feminist values_ these include relationship, caring, and collaboration. Even the structures of our meetings are crafted in a way that reflect the different ways of relating that we hope to foster in the wider world. For example, we begin each gathering with a personal check-in where everyone shares how they are doing and what is going on in their life in depth. We set this time aside and begin here to say: above the value you add to our organization, we care about you as a person and want to be attentive to your well-being. In this simple act, the students heard or learned

at the Center that they *matter*. Based on what students shared about why they came or continued to be involved at the Center, this worked. In essence, the students came to the Center to *belong*.

I too connected to an experience of belonging during this cycle. Even in taking the risk of trying something new in terms of how we came into the space by introducing art and shared models of research, I felt vulnerable and seen. Using art was not based in literature as much as it came from my own desire to play with mediums of expression in research. The way I used my authority in facilitating this cycle was no longer exerted, but rather I was simply offering my gifts, my vision, and full self. In this, I came into the community in a new way and invited students to do the same.

Similarly, the students' ideas and images of social justice centered on an experience of community. Words like solidarity, family, and togetherness were the most frequently referenced in their visions and shared notes. In fact, oneness and the phrase "we are all the same" appeared multiple times. The most common image was of hands embracing or overlapping on one another. In all of this, something that stuck out to me was how much the students' experience of community_ feeling safe and known in the Center_ informed their sense of what a different world and social order would look like. Within the container of a community that they felt safe and known, they projected our golden shadow out onto what social justice would look like on a big picture level. One student said it well when she said to the group in our closing reflection, "I am so much better because of you. We are so much better as a we."

My Practice

Something happened to the space and community that felt incredibly powerful_ even sacred_ when we began using art and dialogue as vehicles for exploration. There was a felt shift within this cycle that both my supervisor and I noted. Some of this shift is simply the magic of a group of people coming together authentically, but I was also struck by the power and potential of generative and representative approaches to social justice.

Generative. As I reflected on this felt difference, I realized that I had never been asked such an appreciative question when talking about social justice. So often, my experience of engaging social justice is a deficit-based approach, problematizing the current power structures and systems in which we find ourselves. Truly, the opportunity to think about what we are creating when we talk about a socially just world felt like a rarity. Most of my conversations around social justice revolve around the problems of the current system more so than our vision of a new one. Let me be clear, I think this critique and consciousness-raising is crucial; we must have a clear understanding of the current system and its problems in order to create a better world. And, when we are not explicit in what those issues are, we end up coming up with ideologies like color-blindness, actually exerting dominance with frames that require assimilation in our denial of difference (Gillespie, Ashbaugh, & DeFiore, 2002). However, we must also move *beyond* a critique toward what could be. With this, I was reminded of my own journey in embracing beauty. Some time ago, I realized the extent to which beauty practices and standards are established by a sexist, capitalist regime of power and I intentionally moved away from working toward the “ideal” society places before us in

terms of beauty. Yet, without building a new framework for how I understood and defined beauty, I did not just walk away from the practices, but from a sense of my own attractiveness. What transpired was an oppositional stance where I came to identify myself in contrast to society, and thus continued to be bound by societal norms, simply bound against them instead of being wrapped up in them. It was not until I crafted my own understanding of beauty_ Inner Light shining through_ that I could truly move beyond the constraints and confines of sexism in terms of my self-image. I share this journey because I think the social justice movement needs a similar liberation. We cannot only define ourselves in terms of what we want to oppose_ racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, cisgenderism, classism, etc. We need to also develop and dream of what we want to create. In the absence of systems of oppression, what can, or should, be present? This question is a generative one, beckoning our imaginations to awaken and play with what we wish to know and experience. Even the fact that belonging was the starting place of the conversation for our students points to deep human desires_ and how could these be better fulfilled were we not hindered, and hurt, by boxes, rules, and systems of privileging particular groups?

Additionally, our visioning questions provide a sharp contrast for bringing understanding to the limits of our current system. For some, asking what a socially just world would look like illuminates the extent of injustice in our current world. The juxtaposition of these visions and our current realities highlight the work we have to do in a new way, with a goal to work toward as we engage in the process of social justice. With all of this, I came to determine that the types of questions we asked in exploring

social justice are important for what they inspire. Questions that look not only to the problems but also toward what we wish to create have a generative nature that opens up hope, direction, and insight. As Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) propose of appreciative inquiry in action research:

...the generative incapacity of contemporary action-research derives from the discipline's unquestioned commitment to a secularized problem-oriented view of the world and thus to the subsequent loss of our capacity as researchers and practitioners to marvel, and in marveling to embrace, the miracle and mystery of social organization. (p. 131)

In this, the appreciative nature of our questions and general orientation to what could be as an organization generates power and potential untapped with a problem orientation focusing exclusively on social critique. This perspective plays with our understanding of the relationship between the research design and questions to the outcomes and discovery of the organization.

Representative. There was something powerful about using art, metaphor, and visual representations as we envisioned a socially just world. To begin with, this aided me in my practice of inviting students into the research process. At the conclusion of each dialogue, we do a "one breath" where everyone shares what they are sitting with as we close. I began having students write these one breaths, so that as they appeared in my research they would not be my report of them, but from the students.

Additionally, the shared notes included everyone in representing our experience.

Beyond just opening up who provided data, art and imagery allowed us to speak to

things we don't have words for. For me, I have associations, images, and partial thoughts (one student calls them "half thoughts") in terms of what social justice looks like more than I have a fully articulated vision. We don't have a reference point or experience of social justice to date, so the representative nature of art felt appropriate__ necessary, even__ as a way of accessing something we have yet to experience. Using visual representation gave me access to pieces inside myself that I would not have necessarily recognized, let alone shared, if we were relying on mere words. Students shared that the art gave them ways to point to ideas that they didn't have words for. In being asked to create an artistic expression of our visions, we entered into a space that relied more fully upon our intuition and inner knowing. These new forms of expression coincided with new ways of thinking and knowing, a movement that gender equality would certainly bring, as we are released from the shackles of gender binaries and rigid "masculine" structures of logic. Alternative expression is a shift that social justice may inspire, if not require. For social justice to be realized, our human capacity for empathy, love, and community must expand; I think that with this, we will honor and value people's expression in all forms, and art may take a new role in society, just as we saw it doing in our own community.

Reflection-to-Action: Inquiring

This summer, I traveled to Sri Lanka for a class studying a grassroots community organization, Sarvodaya. Sarvodaya's development model is unique in their holistic approach. A Buddhist organization, they say that human suffering would still exist even with a robust economy, and, given this, when we look to community development we

must look beyond building the economy to building the social, spiritual, and cultural wellness of individuals, villages, and eventually the world (Macy, 1985). What I found as we journeyed through cycle two is that the same is true of social justice. While understanding and undermining systems of power and privilege is imperative, creating a socially just world encapsulates more than this. I don't want every person to simply have the same level of access to opportunities (equality), or even positions and opportunities that are a unique fit for them (equity); I want a world where people are invited to become their authentic selves_and feel cherished for who she he, or ze is. This invitation requires creativity; our perception and experiences are bound by the systems we live in, systems ridden with power dynamics. As Bohm (2004) noted:

...Doing what you like is seldom freedom, because what you like it determined by what you think and that is often a pattern which is fixed. Therefore we have a creative necessity which we discover... of how to operate in a group [or in the world] in a new way. (p.28)

Thus, coming into our authentic selves and understanding what we want to create in pursuing social justice requires creative thinking that will free us up from old patterns of internalized isms. This cycle reiterated to me the significance of how we inquire, and the importance of using lines of inquiry that invite new ways of thinking. Embedded into future cycles was the question: *How do I inquire into social justice from an appreciative place_ creating space for generative, creative, and artistic ways of understanding the world and dreaming the future world?* As I explored this, I was also aware of the importance that this journey happened within the container of community.

It is in the experience of belonging_ a microcosm of what we hope to create on a larger scale_ that both individual development and creative visioning could be birthed. Thus, the experience of inviting students into the process comes before the inquiring, as their belonging created the space for our next cycle.

Cycle Three: Believing

Action

At this point, we had spent a semester journeying through the four pillars and doing a variety of visioning activities to explore social justice. With my hopes of both inviting and inquiring at the forefront of how I engaged the students, my supervisor and I planned our spring training quite differently than ever before. We used open space, a reflective gallery, and collaborative training with the UFMC to continue our work of exploring social justice.

Open space. Because of my observations around power, I was wary of designing the training under the assumption that my supervisor and I knew what we needed to address and explore. With this in mind, we decided to begin the training using something known as open space technology, where participants generate the topics for discussion and reflection and then have small dialogue circles around the areas that they want to engage (Herman, 2006). We asked the students, *what topics relating to social justice do you want to explore*, and provided time for everyone to rotate through small groups around the areas of interest we came up with.

Reflective gallery. To walk through our experience to date and collectively discover what we learned from it, I created a gallery of all of the art pieces from cycles one and two (see Appendix G). We had time to walk around the room and reflect on our experience while looking at: the art projects done with CASA around the liberation quote; a wordle of all of their initial values they came up with during fall training; a picture of the summer reading book; one breaths following our dialogue about the dynamics within the summer reading being alive in the Center; a picture from the trip to Cabrillo with the multicultural center; our one breaths from all of the reflection questions in cycle two; the personal visions from cycle two; shared notes from the visioning dialogue; and the list of open space topics from the morning's session. Because this was our spring training, we also had three students new to the Center that this was serving as their orientation. I was careful to include a description of every activity with each art piece. Before we began the dialogue, I encouraged the new folks that they provided a unique perspective in terms of noticing and observing things that may not be apparent to those of us who this was already our day-to-day. I welcomed them into the process and encouraged participation to the degree they desired, being sure that I also wrote the dialogue questions in a way that included them. After we walked about the gallery, we had time to journal about what stood out to us and then had a dialogue around the following questions:

1. What have you thought or observed about how the Women's Center engages with, defines, and approaches social justice?

OR

2. In a metaphor, how would you describe the Women's Center's social justice framework?
3. What did you learn about the process of learning about social justice (either today or with time at the Center as a whole)?
4. What do you think our collective experience could teach someone in terms of engaging social justice?
5. What are the most prominent themes that you heard today?

Throughout the dialogue, we practiced shared note taking and then had time for a written reflection on what we were sitting with from the process (Appendix H). Both the shared notes and personal reflections were included in the data analysis for coding. All of this was designed with the intent to open up who is a knowledge holder, as well as maintain a generative and representative approach to the learning.

Collaborative training with the UPMC. For the final portion of training, we partnered with the multicultural center again to explore the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and gender, among other social identities. Again based on our movement to a model of power-sharing, a student from each center created the outline and plan for this portion of training. The students facilitated an activity to explore and reflect on their multiple identities and then showed a video of a poetry slam with a discussion after to unpack the poets' message and connection to our work.

Our Process

As I sorted through the data from cycle three, the word that kept emerging for me was *belief*. Unlike belonging, which appeared frequently in the data from cycle two, belief

was not worked with a lot in terms of what was offered. Yet, I continued to sense that what was being worked all cumulated in the idea of believing__ in our self and our own knowledge, our visions, and the process of realizing social justice.

When we started with open space, we had to wait for a long three minutes before any student contributed to the board. I think that their hesitation came from them being accustomed my supervisor and I normally guiding the conversation more than we did in this activity. When I later shared about my own reflection on my power, one student in a focus group said:

I noticed a shift in your leadership this year compared to last where... it was just, um, less of a 'let's go to Stacey and Erin [my supervisor] to tell us what to do.'

You stopped talking as much, which was weird for me because I was so used to hearing your voice. And when it was less present, I noticed it, but it allowed for a lot more growth and sharing of ideas amongst us. It helped to put us on the same level so we were able to draw from our own experiences and wisdom.

This became evident during open space, because the message that the activity sent was that they were equally as qualified or equipped to lead the conversation around social justice. While there was an initial reticence to do so, once one or two students had written on the board, the ideas kept flowing. Similarly, the student facilitator for the portion of the training with the UFMC shared that she initially felt hesitant about coming up with the training outline. Yet, my belief in her ability to do so helped her see herself as capable.

The students' belief in their ability to not just engage in, but also guide the conversation continued to build throughout the research. I opened the dialogue in cycle three by sharing that I hoped to co-create theory, reminding them all that they, whether they were starting that day or had been with the Center since coming to USD, had experienced our ways of being and thus had knowledge to claim. Just like the student facilitator, as I communicated that they were knowledge-creators, they began to see themselves as such. Creating an invitational space with genuine inquiry provided them the opportunity to stand firmly in what they knew, thought, and believed. The design cultivated a sense of agency and self-belief. When I asked what must be captured when I tell our story, one thing the students highlighted was how empowering the research process was, noting that, "you fostered my development in a way that helped me realize that I can make a difference."

Just as I experienced belonging alongside the students in the previous cycle, I also felt that believing was a part of my experience in cycle three. For me, my learning was in believing in my ability to actually further the aims of social justice. When the students showed that they were beginning to believe in their capacity to create change, I subsequently believed in my ability as an advisor to engender a sense of agency and confidence. During the dialogue following the gallery, one student said that her greatest take away from the research was realizing that "we all have the capacity within us." In hearing things like this, I certainly believed in the value and worth of my research and practice.

The students also demonstrated a strengthened belief in the process of social justice. All of the shared notes from this cycle were laden with the words reflection, growth, process, and the idea that there is no “right way” to approach this work. They showed a strong orientation to process, discussing the movement from reflection to work at the Women’s Center to life, which, they explained, is cyclical. We discussed how social justice requires constant evolving and evaluation of oneself and how it depends on internal change. With this, I again think that what they were experiencing inside themselves was then what became most salient in terms of their understanding of social justice as a whole. Just like in cycle two when community was their motivation and subsequently the overriding concept of social justice to them, as students’ sensed themselves and their understanding of justice evolving, then social justice became an evolutionary process. While some of that is merely a projection, it also indicates a deeper and more internalized approach to the work. We were no longer discussing what was “out there” in terms of power, but “in here” _ in our Center, yes_ and also in our own hearts, minds, and wills. I noticed this shift in me as I thought about my power not in terms of using it inappropriately, but in recognizing its strength within me. When we believed in our capacity to create change, we came to see ourselves as social actors, and thus capable of either interrupting or perpetuating systems.

Within this cycle, value words were much more prevalent than before. It seemed like students were also gaining a greater sense of what values would align to manifest a socially just world. As they came to believe in their self-agency to make this world

possible, they also came to believe in their sense of what values would support this work.

One woman returned from a month in Argentina just before this cycle began. She shared with us the idea of *La Lucha*, “the struggle,” a phrase that captures the empowerment of a community gathered to end oppression. Yosso (2005) calls this type of strength “resistance capital” and noted that knowing how to challenge the status quo is a resource and source of wealth. Resistance capital has transformational power when coupled with critical consciousness of structural oppression, as it is within the Center. Believing, then, is about knowing our strength while also knowing the ways that the system works to deny and disavow our value. Another concept that appeared over and over again in cycle three was intersectionality. Within cycle two, this was engaged through the lens of “identity,” while at this point the students became more explicit about the intersections of identity. This distinction is an important one, for it demonstrates that they were moving to a place of understanding that the statement from cycle two “we are all the same” is in fact far more complex. To me, while there is a deep connection in our humanity and we should work to recognize and foster this, there is also deep dissension in both our experiences of oppression based on the intersection of identities and ourselves as individuals with great variety in both culture and personality. For me, oneness and sameness are quite different, and a socially just world would not move us toward sameness, as that would only be possible through massive assimilation. Working from a lens of intersectionality means that we were gaining a more nuanced understanding of *La Lucha* that allows for solidarity amongst women

while also acknowledging that our lived experiences differ based on other salient identities. I mentioned this here because the extent and type of resistance capital each woman has varies. Nonetheless, believing in our power included believing in our ability to challenge systems and relying on the strength of our community, our belonging, to do so.

This later point reiterates that it is through *belonging* that students entered into a stage of *believing*, as their belief was cultivated within the context of the community. One woman wrote in her reflection, “Faith comes from what we experience in community. We want to see change, love, peace, hope, and a better world but the faith we have is what motivates me to keep going with *La Lucha!*” The community, whether providing sustenance as the daily struggle brought them down, or inspiration as they realized the extent to which others face struggles, shaped their understanding and ability to believe in the possibility of something different. One of the new students captured this in her reflection on the day:

There’s a sense of comfort within the Women’s Center that has encouraged me to share my ideas today. This ‘comfortability’ within a group of women with different backgrounds and approaches to social justice is a good reflection of the sense we need to create globally to achieve justice.

For myself, I know that the vision I cultivated was strengthened__was perhaps made possible__ by my experience of a more just community. Because of what I felt and experienced working with the students and staff at the Women’s Center, I reach higher in terms of I what I think humans are capable of in how we come together.

Another trend that emerged during this cycle was a sense of students' belonging within a greater movement. Even in utilizing the idea of *La Lucha*, the students connected their work toward justice in the context of larger efforts. A phrase that appeared in many of the shared notes is "someone has come before me." With the prominence of nature themes and this analogy of us carrying a legacy of those before us, I drew my shared notes an image of Mother Earth holding the world with her tree roots, speaking to the connection of a legacy of justice. I was inspired to draw this as the students spoke about the sacredness of the process, the Feminine, and mothers carrying our work. As another student said, "we are fully supported and fully lifted by the image of a strong woman." Additionally, there was a lot of talk of interconnection, and it seemed that students sensed their work in connection to the work of people before them. Thus, believing came not only from our own community but also from the community of activists, and women, of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

My Practice

While all of this was very exciting and did incite belief, I was somewhat wary of such ethereal ideas without a commitment to action or grounding in the present. Two related tensions emerged that were less promising to me: a pattern of a new "us versus them" and what I will call "oasis versus transformation."

Us v. them. Something that became apparent as I reflected on how we engaged social justice was that, in some ways, we were creating a new hierarchy in terms of who "gets it," or is committed to social justice, and who doesn't. Injustices are really rooted in the Other_ making some perceived or real difference *less than* what we know or are

used to, and cementing this hierarchy on both psychological and institutional levels (Massey, 2007). Yet, as we came to surface the way that this dynamic plays out in our lives and world, we were creating a new “other,” of those less aware of or concerned with such dynamics. I noticed this initially when I reflected on how I considered myself in relation to my students thinking of myself as somehow “further along” in learning or understanding social justice. The same pattern was present in the students and how they viewed people on campus—sometimes it felt like how they viewed the rest of campus. One student literally explained during a meeting how we needed to convert people to our “team.” This was taken to an extreme, too. For example, in the Center we tried to be very mindful of language and communicate in ways that are inclusive and reflective of our values. With this, one phrase that we try not to use is “you guys”. Some students reported not being able to listen to what people were saying when they used the phrase too often. While I agreed that language is significant, I did not agree that creating rules and policing them was the way to realize justice. I think that we need people to see racism, sexism, and other systemic power dynamics as a problem; we need them to understand how they contribute to these problems; and we need them to commit to confronting socialized ways of seeing, thinking, and being. Yet, ignoring or dismissing what people say when they do not conform to a set of rules we created is not the best way to accomplish this aim. We cannot simply flip the power structures and replace them with new hierarchies. Throughout my research, what to do with this became a difficult question for me. At one point, I brought this tension to my validation group and spoke of meeting people where they are. One member offered that it is not

meeting people where they are at, but meeting people, period. For, implicit in “where they are at,” is a destination of where we would like them to get to or be. Still, as I wrote this, I struggled with the fact that I want to confront people as they perpetuate oppressive systems. And, I need to learn to do so in a way that is both authentic to who I am and allows them to be their authentic self, flaws (and “you guys”) included.

Oasis v. transformation. A connected tension is what I labeled “oasis v. transformation”. The heart of this tension is in the fact that the mission of the Women’s Center’s Leadership Council, and aim of the Center as a whole, is to transform campus; while a primary or frequent function of the Center is to provide a reprieve or safe space when the campus does not feel like one. As cycle two revealed with the theme of belonging, one way that the Center serves students is by providing community. Often, students come to the Center when they are aggravated by something that was said in class or unsure of how to address or make sense of something they experienced in a meeting. We are an oasis__ a safe and counter space__ to the structures of power we are embedded in as a society and institution. We even contribute to this self-image in our emphasis of how we “do things differently”. The organizational structure and processes that we utilized are intentional in distinguishing ourselves, yet how does this distinction make it so that we view the Center as an exception, an oasis? A question that surfaced during my research was: is this all we want to be? Is our aim to provide this counter space, or, do we want to transform campus so that counter spaces are no longer needed? I think that the answer is that we want to be both__ a counter space for equipping leaders to usher in transformation so that, one day, oases are not longer

needed and until then, there is a place to go and a place that will send you out. The question really lies in how to implement these two simultaneously. Especially for the students, they shared struggling with how to do the latter. The experience of safety and belonging in the Center created the container for their belief, a sort of sandbox to serve as a testing ground for thinking and being in new ways. Yet, they frequently came back and said that it was difficult to enact this elsewhere, that the experience at the Center was not one of “sending out,” but instead hiding within. Transformation was not an aim because they were still struggling with congruence. While they could stand firmly in belief in the context of the Center, when they returned to friends or organizations elsewhere, they felt tongue-tied or uncertain, or silenced. One student closed her reflection in cycle three with this:

How can we accomplish this organic, transformational process in such a hierarchical artificial world? This works in the Center, but how can we train the community to take this beyond the SLP fourth floor (the Center’s location)? Because social justice issues are obviously everywhere and need solving everywhere.

This exemplifies the coming together of both tensions, as the oasis feels like an experience specific to “us” and the campus needing transformation is a “them” of people who they perceive as not having the capacity to change. Yet, underneath this is also the question, “do I have the capacity to bring this to ‘them’?”

Action-to-Reflection: Igniting

As I hinted, the idea of the Center as an oasis also played a part in the “us versus them” dynamic noted above. When we make a point to be different or do things differently, how are we creating the image that we are separate, disparate, and disconnected from the perpetuation of injustices that occur on campus? And we know this is not true, even from the first cycle when we began to acknowledge and address the microaggressions in our own space, as just one example. Social justice is a process because it involves *unlearning*, surfacing the ways of thinking and categorizing rooted in the mental models_ schemas and pictures of the world_ we were socialized with (Senge, 1994b). In both of these tensions, then, the need is to return to ourselves and ask how the dynamics noted in others is present in us. Developmentally, it is most difficult to work with people in the stage you just came from (Wilber, 2000). So, one of the questions when I or a student am being particularly unforgiving of some behavior or developmental place is: what piece of yourself is or was in that, and how have you made peace with yourself for coming from that place?

With all of this, I was left wondering what we do with our belief and how that connects to the dynamics of inclusion and seclusion noted above. Thus, to me the next iteration of my research and practice seemed to be rooted in a movement toward action, *igniting* our community to go from this place and embody it, spread it, in our world. Igniting is about bringing the questions and accusations back to us and owning our parts. It is about going out into the wider community and enacting the values we espouse and practice within the Center. It is about carrying our belief into all areas of our lives. While I did not have all of the answers to my questions around how to engage

folks who are disinterested in the work and how to properly balance changemaking and safe spaces, I did know that I did not want the Women's Center to feel like the exception to a rule. I wanted to grow and expand the number of spaces that foster belonging and believing, and invite people into authentic and restored relationship; I wanted our institutions and structures to be more just. Mainly, though, I wanted our students_ and me_ to feel congruent and aligned in what we envision for the world and how we contribute to that vision in daily life. Thus, my guiding questions were: *How do we move to action? AND, How does this action seek to intentionally meet people without agenda?*

Cycle Four: Being

Action

Given the questions that I was left with in the previous cycle and my learning around inviting and inquiring, I decided to bring these questions of igniting to the students. Igniting is simply about setting or seeing and encouraging a spark. One of the ideas that they rose in open space and the gallery dialogue was the notion of being "tolerant of intolerance;" the themes and questions I was asking were already present and alive in the students as well. Thus, these questions were ripened and ready to be further engaged (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). So, in our next meeting, I asked the question: *What do we do with what we have learned? And what action do we take to live out this learning?* Again, we used shared taking and dialogue to explore our call and plan for action (see Appendix J). Additionally, in my one-on-ones and time with students, I continued to ask

about the action they wanted to take. While the focus groups served to validate my findings and conclusions, they too were a part of the action of cycle four. In looking at our overall journey of engaging social justice to date, the question underneath it was *what do we do with all of this*. As the closing cycle of my research, I was essentially asking: so what? Even in thinking about what the research taught us and how it led to action acted as a source of *igniting* and eliciting change. In many ways, this cycle is ongoing (as they all are), for there is a continued process and intention to enact our values and experience in our campus community and world.

Our Process

An interesting shift occurred in this cycle, with the extent to which imperative sentences were present. In cycle three, value words were most prevalent, where here far more verbs were used, reflecting the movement toward *being*. Amongst the most frequently referenced imperatives were: challenge everything, ask questions, be present, and be differently.

Challenge everything. The students talked about challenges a lot in this cycle and the phrase “challenge everything” appeared in many shared notes. The call to action was one that was challenging for them and I think that, similar to previous cycles, they were projecting the place they were currently in onto their vision and understanding of social justice. Additionally, this points to the extent to which they were engaging in the process of challenging themselves. In moving toward *being*, they discussed the ways in which they were pushing themselves to look at their actions, behaviors, and choices and challenge where those were coming from. As they aligned

how they lived out their beliefs, they were confronting_ and undoing_ socialized patterns. Something that came up that had not surfaced previously was the notion that the Women's Center provides space to talk about things that they feel like are "taboo" topics; saying, "we have conversations here that can't happen elsewhere." In connection to the conversation about transforming campus, I think that some of what we were wading through was the ability to move these conversations into other spaces. For, it is when the students feel like they expand the places that they address these topics that they have a sense that they are living their values. Students shared that the myth that these conversations "can't happen elsewhere" is what prevents them from moving from a place of commitment and belief to one of congruence (being). Some of what they were challenging, then, were their own notions of rules of engagement, or at least their choice in playing by those rules. One student frequently shared in our one-on-ones about her struggle to stand up and speak out for her beliefs in conversations with friends outside of the Center. In this dialogue, she shared, "'I've taken it upon myself to share this knowledge and expand the spaces that offer this experience."

Ask questions. Alongside the notion of "challenge everything" was "ask questions". This seemed to be where students landed in regards to what to do with the felt need to be "tolerant of intolerance". They did not suggest that we should actually tolerate or condone oppressive behavior, but instead that we should engage in a way that sought to understand where a person was coming from. It was helpful for me to hear them make sense of this nuanced difference, as I was still working through my own

ideas of allowing space for people to be disinterested in social justice. In short, they moved to a place where they wanted to see that person as a human being, as opposed to an enemy or opponent. We talked through how to meet people, see ourselves in another, connect to someone's humanity, and actively seek conversation and dialogue. Questions, they urged, were a way to move toward these ideals while also stirring in another person further reflection, and perhaps an evaluation of their values and notions of the world. Much like how our cycle began with *belonging*, the students made me realize that these people whom I struggle to embrace need to first feel a sense of belonging_of being known and valued_ before they will engage in any conversation that could lead them to belief. It is only after belief is cultivated that any expectation for being can exist; and this is a developmental process! Thus, my expectations on people in terms of living out *my* values are not only authoritative, but also utterly unreasonable. This, coupled with the four pillars, created a powerful model for how to engage those disengaged: (a) I need to know my own values, which call me to love and accept where people are coming from; (b) I need to explore my own identity, which will open my eyes to the parts of myself I feel less developed or comfortable with and thus resist in another, while also acknowledging how our experiences (and subsequent understanding of social justice) differ based on our social identities; (c) I need to address issues, meaning I can be clear about my convictions and views *so long as this is in the context of the other pillars*; and (d) I need to be mindful of power, being aware of my voice and role in the conversation. Even as I wrote this, I realized that I often behave like_or even think that_ pillar "c" (addressing issues) is paramount to the other foundational points,

acting as if I am separate from the dynamics I am attempting to confront. In the students' discussion of the significance of questions, particularly for the purpose of developing empathy, I learned how to better live my own values in letting go of unhealthy thought patterns that will open up the possibility for me to meet people more authentically. In short, I made steps toward *being* that aligned with my espoused values. All of this is a humbling reminder too, that there is no point of "arrival." As I work this out today, tomorrow will be another piece of learning. And that piece too will require challenging everything and asking questions.

Be present. A related imperative statement that showed up in many places in the final dialogue was one about presence. Connected to this same conversation about embracing people and embracing difference, we were working through the role of being present to someone and to the current moment in this work. At the time, I did not know how to make sense of this theme, but noted the connection between the literature on learning organizations, particularly Scharmer's (2009) piece around presencing.

Be differently. Throughout our dialogue on action, one student said a phrase that appeared in multiple shared notes: be differently. She spoke of how the Center created a container to try out different ways of coming together and how that was the space where she learned to trust and carry out her values. In essence, she described the cycle of belonging, believing, and being. The students used the language of "embodying of our ideal community" (i.e. a socially just world). They talked about the Center being a space that embodies the values we hope to see in the world, and thus serves as an

example of what that world could look like. Just as it is through belonging that believing is cultivated, being is made possible through the clarity that belief provides.

The idea of *being* is closely aligned with that of Komives & Wagner's (2009) congruence; moving to a place where we live out our values and ensure there is congruence between what we espouse and how we live. Within the questions I asked, I was quite intentional about approaching this endeavor as a daily activity. My supervisor remembered one student who shared that through her involvement at the Women's Center, she learned that activism is not exclusive to activities such as attending a protest, but is instead a daily choice and undertaking. We discussed this a lot at the Center, looking to the language that we use, organizations we involve ourselves with, who and how we form relationships, and how we come together and interact with others, as aspects of our visions and values lived out. In all of this, our understanding of action was really rooted in *enacting* (and embodying) values. I often used the language of living, leading, and loving from a justice-orientation: seeing, respecting, and celebrating each person for their individual strengths and gifts, with an awareness of the systems that have sought to undermine this inherent power and light within, and a commitment to challenging said systems on institutional, interpersonal, and individual levels. My research was an exemplar of this, an attempt to continue to chip away at the oppressor within by examining the ways I used my power and voice, and moving to a place of living into my vision of justice. Gandhi's quote is used a lot, "be the change you want to see in the world;" one of my professors offered a modification when she misquoted him, saying: *live the world you want to see*. I liked what this modification did;

for, in it, there is an invitation to see yourself as a social actor, an inquiry into what script you'd like to act in, and a call to *be* that person. Thus, in *being*, we are actually *inviting* a different type of social order; when we choose not to perpetuate systems, we are choosing to create a new system, breathing it into being.

Engaging Social Justice Through the Cycles

My Practice: Inviting, Inquiring, Igniting

The new action I took with each cycle was informed by my reflection on my personal practice. This is summarized by my movement toward inviting, inquiring, and igniting through power-sharing, appreciative inquiry, and action-orientation, respectively (see Figure 6).

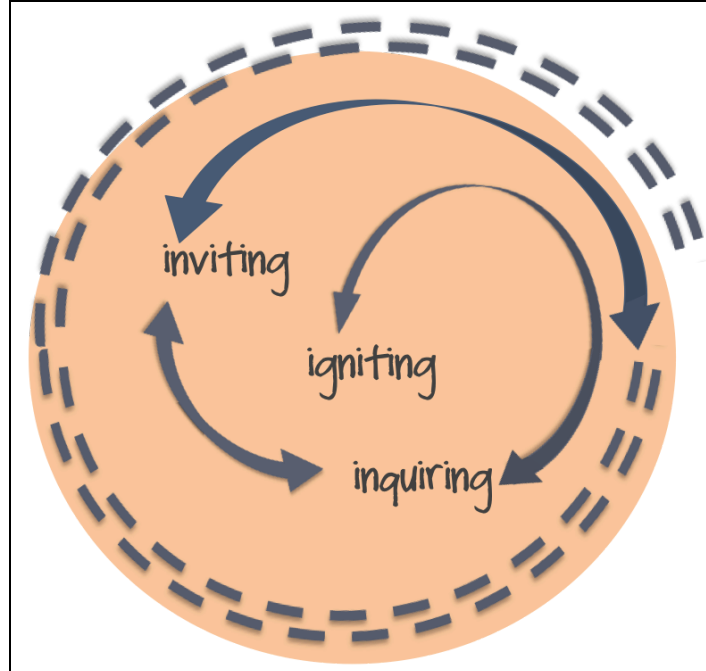


Figure 6: Interventions for Justice-Learning. This image depicts my change in action with each cycle.

Inviting. Quite beautifully, the shortcomings of my initial versions of “participatory” became some of the most significant aspects of the learning. In terms of understanding social justice, the power of moving toward a more justice-oriented relationship with students cannot be overstated. As I came to see my students through new eyes, their role in the research transformed, while their sense of both themselves and the concepts of social justice became embodied and lived out. Just as Action Research seeks to bridge the researcher-practitioner divide, I too sought to bridge (or burn) hierarchical notions of teacher-student, leader-follower, you-me. This called for an orientation to power that shared it, inviting students to journey alongside me as co-creators. As I shifted my view to seeing them as partners in the research, they viewed themselves as such and their involvement moved from experiencing, to contributing to, to creating the journey. An interesting tension in this was how to be both participatory and transparent. I struggled with when and how to share my personal reflection, as I did not want to shift the direction of the research and findings, while I also did not want to be guarded with what I shared.

Inquiring. When I first began this journey, my validation group cautioned me about engaging social justice in a way that merely teaches students the “social justice script.” While an understanding of power and privilege is imperative, simply learning to acknowledge these dynamics to be “down” with the cause will not transform our world. Even for those of us who are allies, we must let go of the rules of what it means to be an ally_ as depicted in the “us v. them” tension around what words you say, what values

you espouse, etc. Thus, *inquiry* took on an important role in opening up vision and possibilities for the future we were creating. One student reflected in the focus group:

For me the inquiry part helped me in a positive way. That has never been a part of my life and, at first, it was like, 'What is this girl doing? Why is she asking me this?' For me. it was just heartbreaking in a sense to think that I could talk shit, but I still don't know what I want it to look like. I know what I what to change and what I what to get rid of in my life and in the world. I think for me the ignition was just burning shit_its not changing anything; I am not creating anything. I am just burning stuff down. That question about creating stuck with me the entire semester.

What this student spoke to is precisely what I found in my own reflection on the value and role of appreciative inquiry in social justice learning. In reflecting on these visions, another student noted that she appreciated how different everyone's visions were, saying, "Maybe social justice will look different in different places_ we think we know what communities or people want, sometime we need to just ask questions and listen." With this, she was moving to a place of understanding that the core of social justice is an order in which people have the space to be who they are. Thus, inquiry facilitated an openness to the various ways one takes up the work.

Igniting. One dynamic that was very alive in the Center was an ability to talk about these ideas without doing anything with them. Thus, igniting became important in moving beyond a place of merely espousing values, ideas, and beliefs. A helpful tool in

this was to simplify how we understand action_ reminding ourselves that this can be taken up in the daily choices and questions we ask ourselves.

Guiding Questions for My Practice

While my central research question was: *how do we engage justice-learning at the Women's Center*, within each change in action, an additional research question was embedded in my practice and future reflection. As I outlined throughout my cycles, these new questions were:

- How do I engage my students as full contributors to_ and authors of_ the research and their learning [inviting]?
- How do I inquire into social justice from an appreciative place_ creating space for generative, creative, and artistic ways of understanding the world and dreaming the future world [inquiring]?
- How do we move to action and how does this action seek to intentionally meet people without agenda [igniting]?

These served as framing questions for each cycle specifically, but were also carried into subsequent cycles. As I moved to a place of inquiring, I held onto my intention to invite the students in, and maintained an aim to invite and inquire when we moved to a place of igniting action. To implement the model of social justice learning offered here, one should pay attention to the questions above.

From Practice to Process

These three specific changes in my practice fit well with and contribute to the cycles of belonging, believing and being. With this, my interventions created the space for the 3

B's to be experienced. As I opened up my practice to truly come alongside students, they were invited into a space for them to *belong* in new ways. The appreciative nature of visioning incited *belief* in the world to come. A call to action ignited our community to embody and *be* the change we wished to see. Turning my attention to the spheres of inviting, inquiring, and igniting moved my practice to one that facilitated the process of the 3 B's, as Figure 7 depicts.

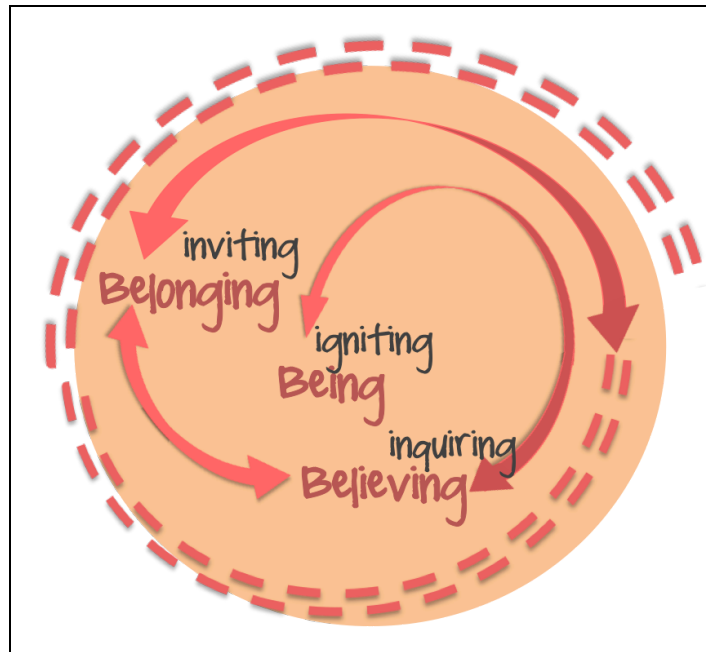


Figure 7: From Practice to Process. This image shows the relationship between my change in practice and the stages of social justice learning.

Research Framing

During one of my research check-in's with my advisor, she asked if my research really was about "engagement" of social justice, as that posits social justice as something static and understood with which we merely interact. Really, I think that a part of the research was figuring out (1) what social justice is and (2) what to do with

that understanding. With this, what we did with social justice differed within each cycle. In some ways, there was a different verb for each cycle and series of questions, which culminate in “engagement.” Treating engagement as the umbrella, I think that we explored social justice in cycle one, experienced it in cycle two, embraced it in cycle three, and enacted it in cycle four. Just as there were questions underneath each shift in my practice, there was a nuanced intention within every stage of the process, explained in Table 1.

Table 1. What is it to “Engage” Social Justice?

Cycle	Engaging Social Justice	
1	Explore:	Looking to what social justice is and means to us (pillars)
2	Experience:	Community created experience of just-Relationship (belonging)
3	Embrace:	Growing commitment to values and vision of justice (believing)
4	Enact:	Movement toward living our vision of a just world (being)

Through all of this, we engaged social justice. As my cycles indicated, a model for doing so emerged throughout our work. With the model and further reflection, there are implications for my practice and the field of social justice education, which will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Model of Social Justice Learning

When I began my research, I went to the literature to look into community service-learning models, thinking surely that incorporating a community-based component into the experience at the Center would be the way to improve our engagement of social justice learning. Throughout the entire research period, this has been a part of the intent and a conversation with a student who wanted to coordinate the experience. We engaged in conversations with a community development organization just across the border in Tijuana about hosting a day trip once a semester to have dialogue circles with women organizers in their local communities. Additionally, we conversed with a local nonprofit that works to empower women and girls. Yet, nothing crystalized in all of this exploration. As our experiences at the Center felt like a microcosm of what they hoped to create on a global scale, I was struck by the notion that this in and of itself was an immersion experience. What we experienced as a community immersed us in alternative ways of knowing and connecting, which further informed our grasp of the injustice and potential just-future of the world. It is through this immersion of a community committed to enacting change in our inner lives, structure, campus, and world that we journeyed through the stages of *belonging*, *believing*, and *being* relying on the pillars of social justice education and embedded into

the cycles of reflection, vision, dialogue, and reflection. Our process, then, looks like this:



Figure 8: Model of Social Justice Learning. This images shows the overall model that emerged throughout our research.

Components of the model

Here, I will walk through each component of the model and also explore the ways that it shifted from my initial representation following the focus groups and my meetings with my validation group.

Container. As I indicated throughout my writing, the research design greatly informed the research itself and created a container that held our exploration. Thus, the reflection, vision, dialogue, and expression are not merely vehicles, but a piece of the work itself. In the final focus groups critiquing the model, students reiterated the significance of this piece. One student said, “The reflection, vision, dialogue, and expression are some of the most important parts, especially if you’ve never had that space before. In our society, people think ‘reflection?!’ Ain’t nobody got time for that.” Many agreed, emphasizing the idea that the way that we come together to encourage self inquiry and collective processes greatly shaped how we came to understand ourselves and our world. They went on to say that more spaces with such a frame are needed in the world for the type of change we yearn for to be realized.

Initially, my container was a circle with arrows to all four components. Both the focus groups and the validation groups disagreed with this. First, the students asked for a representation that was “more spikey,” to speak to the messiness of reflection and dialogue in particular. Secondly, the circular nature created a closed system that was too insular given the intention of this research frame to influence more than the group itself. This latter revision is telling given the revealed tension of oasis v. transformation in cycle four. It forced me to ask myself to what extent my thought process has been one that is insular and closed_ if I think about our “container” as a holding environment without thought for the movement outside of it, of course the dynamics noted will be alive. Thus, I am challenged in my practice to think about the container of reflection, vision, dialogue, and expression as one pointing out_ expanding my thinking around

inviting to go beyond the students in the Center and to the community as a whole.

When I use this container in a way that invites others in, I will grow my practice and influence as a social justice educator.

Pillars. As I spoke to in my reflection on the pillars working in concert with one another, these really are foundational in social justice learning and necessitate attending to all four. The students validated this, with one woman saying:

I think for me they [the pillars] are very intertwined: to explore my own identity is to explore those values that are important to me, and is the same as addressing issues because those issues are connected to the values that I hold.

The students also agreed that noticing power is something that was something new for them to pay attention to, citing *Unlikely Allies* as an impetus for a lot of their reflection on power dynamics within their own life. They indicated that the Women's Center is increasingly moving to a place where that fourth pillar (noticing power) is engaged.

Another theme that emerged as students discussed the pillars was the personal call that the pillars provided in terms of enacting social justice. They shared that these activities brings "social justice to a level more relate-able and doable." In unpacking this, they agreed that approaching social justice through the four pillars makes it so that the task is a personal one, rooted in their own being rather than ideas about systems "out there."

In my representation of the pillars, I originally made them beneath the cyclical process of belonging, believing, and being so to illustrate them as "foundational." Yet,

the students did not agree with this, saying that they more drive and fuel the process, rather than the process resting upon them. In thinking about the significance of this shift, the students moved me to a place of representing our learning activities as more fluid and less “set” than my own drawing of it. The arrows pointing towards the process connote a more ongoing aspect of reflecting on values, addressing issues, noticing power, and exploring identity, which is certainly more true to the work. For me, this points to my tendency to still think of social justice as something to “figure out.” Acting as if there is an “it” to “get” is far simpler than what this work requires. Thus, there is not a solid platform or foundation, as much as activities that serve the learning. From this perspective, I wonder if pillars are even the best name for the role of values, issues, power, and identity in our work?

Process. As the model reflects, the inner process of social justice learning is two-fold, entailing both (1) the collective experience of movement through belonging, believing, and being and (2) the practitioner’s interventions of inviting, inquiring, and igniting. The students and validation group had a lot to say in terms of the interplay between the two. Mainly, they had me make the arrows bi-directional, so to point to the interweaving and interchanging nature where we find ourselves in multiple places at once, and moving back and forth between stages. Students insisted that you can begin anywhere and go in any direction. One woman spoke to the ambiguity and movement of this when she shared:

Yeah, so you are asking questions about whatever and then you find yourself wanting to ignite something, so you find yourself being at the Center to do so. Or

you find yourself belonging to a group of people that are really expressive about their feminist identity and then you are invited to the Center as a result. This addresses, in a way, the different places people are coming from or finding their call to social justice in the Center.

In particular, people paid attention to the relationship between igniting and belonging, saying that, in actuality someone may be *ignited* to invite others into an experience of *belonging*, and thus the cycle begins over again, at perhaps a deeper level or along a new vein of self-learning.

Big Picture. There are a couple of things to note about the overall model and the symbolism of the image portrayed. Much of the imagery relied on themes that emerged throughout our research cycles, namely: allusion to nature, heart lotus shape, and kaleidoscope effect.

Allusion to nature. One of the most intriguing aspects of this process for me was the prevalence of nature in our data. While the sun was the most prominent image, trees, flowers, roots, and water all appeared throughout every cycle, sometimes within the majority of visions and shared notes. As we explored what this was about, a beautiful metaphor evolved: social justice is not about creating something *new*, as much as a natural process of coming into our authentic selves and bringing natural order to human relationship. Just as peace activist Chappell (2012) speaks to humanity's inherent preference to peace and socialization towards something different (i.e. war), the students suggested that we are naturally oriented toward just-Relationship and taught and trained to interact differently. One student reflected:

I had the revelation that social justice is organic. I have never thought of it in that way. It is a beautiful explanation for why to work toward social justice and really captures the essence. I think that people are inherently good and it is the social system that creates hate and intolerance. Thus we're returning to something 'earthy'.

There was general agreement that social justice is indeed an organic process. Words such as earth, natural, simple, and organic increased with each cycle. For this reason, the 3 B's turn into themselves, resembling the logarithmic spiral, a shape speckled throughout nature from the form of galaxies to the intricacy of a conch shell. This symbolizes the process as one where we approach our center, an essence of self and Relationship that is true to who we are as human beings. In our final dialogue, students postulated that, as we unlearn our social constructions, we are freed to connect to our instinct: love. As Williamson (1992) said,

Love is what we are born with. Fear is what we learn. The spiritual journey is the unlearning of fear and prejudices and the acceptance of love back in our hearts.

Love is the essential reality and our purpose on earth. To be consciously aware of it, to experience love in ourselves and others, is the meaning of life. Meaning does not lie in things. Meaning lies in us. (p. 1)

While this is certainly a philosophical stance on the human condition—one that is debated across disciplines—it is how we came to understand nature's prevalence in our visions.

Leadership theorist Wheatley (2001) drew a parallel between the co-creative potential of humans to the process we observe in nature. She reminded readers that, in natural cycles, change occurs through many local actions occurring simultaneously. Wheatley proposed that humans are no exception; many individuals' beckoning of a new tomorrow can coalesce and evolve, creating social progress. With all of this, as I was encouraged to open up the closed system of the circular model I first created, the flower before you emerged.

Heart lotus shape. As people urged me to develop a design that was “more spikey” and less of a closed-system, I was also grappling with what to do with the notion and illustration of the pillars. One validation group member offered that the pillars were actually arteries, as this model is truly a heart_ a process that expands and contracts and goes back out. I could not visually capture such a complex notion, so I moved to the metaphorical representation of the heart chakra, which is what first informed the final shape of the model. In bringing this image to the validation group, they disagreed that it was a chakra, but offered instead that it is a lotus flower. As members of the group went back and forth between the symbolism of a heart (the organ) and a lotus, someone discovered the *lotus of the heart*, an ancient Hindu image described in the *Upanishads: The Wisdom of the Hindu Mystics*, translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester:

Within the city of Brahman, which is the body, there is the heart, and within the heart there is a little house. This house has the shape of a lotus, and within it dwells that which is to be sought after, inquired about, and realized.

What then is that which, dwelling within this little house, this lotus of the heart, is to be sought after, inquired about, and realized?

As large as the universe outside, even so large is the universe within the lotus of the heart. Within it are heaven and earth, the sun, the moon, the lightning, and all the stars. What is in the macrocosm is in this microcosm.

All things that exist, all beings and all desires, are in the city of Brahman; what then becomes of them when old age approaches and the body dissolves in death?

Though old age comes to the body, the lotus of the heart does not grow old. At death of the body, it does not die. The lotus of the heart, where Brahman exists in all his glory—that, and not the body, is the true city of Brahman. (“The Lotus of the Heart in the Hindu Upanishads,” 2009, July 9)

One commentator explained that the heart can be visualized as a lotus flower, unfolding at the center (Rea, n.d.). Finally, Irmansyah Effendi said, “All truth is in your heart, not in the physical heart, but in the core within yourself where your true self resides.” Thus, we settled on this image, as it is not only a nod to the organic process that we uncovered, but denotes the depth and spirituality of this model, in its pursuit of deep self and call to open hearts.

Kaleidoscope effect. The pointillism affect of the outer leaves was to connote the complexity and nested system of social justice learning. Every person is on their individual journey, which also joins and is a part of the mosaic of the collective journey and discovery. Thus, the image sought to capture the kaleidoscopic aspect of social justice_ all the pieces, pillars and container, are a part of the process and are constantly transforming in order, form, and capacity. From both the elements of the model to the participants' individual and collective experiences, the pixelated image speaks to the what Morgan (2006) would identify as a holonic organization_ with individual pieces that make up the whole in a collective, though differentiated, image.

Connection to Development

The general direction of movement through belonging, believing, and being connects with student development theory in the trajectory of: relying on an external authority outside of oneself, such as when a student arrives seeking a sense of belonging amongst peers; developing an internal voice as students cultivated belief in their own sense of self and values; and living from a place of self-authorship with reliance on internal foundation, as we came to be *who and how* we wanted (Nash & Murray, 2010). I did not begin the research with great attention to student development, but the themes and cycle that emerged connects to the literature, charting social justice learning as a developmental journey.

As referenced above, theories exploring the cognitive, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and meaning-making development of students moves from a place

dependent on external authority to one rooted in an internal voice. Kegan's (1998) work highlighted here looks at overall identity development, while Baxter Magolda's (1992 & 2009) wrote about the epistemological reflection of students: that is, how they create and construct knowledge. Parks (2011) looked at the "forms of dependence," namely students' orientation to relationships. I looked at the interplay of these models to gain greater insight into the process of belonging, believing, and being. The relationship between these theories and our model are depicted in Table 2.

I cannot emphasize enough that the parallels I offer here are not to suggest that students have arrived in these later stages of development_ this would be inconsistent with what the theorists have found in terms of age and capacity for development at higher stages. Instead, I offer connections between the themes, questions, and patterns of thought that we engaged with in each cycle and development stages, suggesting that *the questions we engaged would foster development in said areas*. At best, we collectively visited developmental places beyond where we individually reside and live from. To think about it in another way, the following chart is not outlining the developmental stages students were in during the stages of social justice learning, but instead *point to the stages we aspire towards* with the level of complexity and inquiry engaged at the places of belonging, believing, and being. This is an aspirational assertion, but based on my experience and our cycles, I believe that social justice learning is a developmental process that coincides with and, when engaged intentionally, can support identity development.

One final precursor to this exploration is to name the tension in talking about stages as if they are linear, sequential, or clean. Just as the bi-directional arrows point to, this process is one of complexity, where people move back and forth between developmental places, interchange their roles and constructs, and reside in more than one stage in a single time (Evans et al., 1998). While the process of belonging, believing, and being is less a singular journey and more of a dance, so too are the theories explored below.

Table 2. Our Process and Development Theory

	Kegan:	Baxter Magolda:	Parks:
	Forms of Mind	Ways of Knowing	Forms of Dependence
Belonging	Socialized mind	Transitional Knowing	Dependent/ Counter-dependent
Believing	Self-authoring mind	Independent Knowing	Inner dependence (fragile and confident)
Being	Self transforming mind	Contextual Knowing	Interdependence

Belonging. In the first stage, students referenced the desire to belong and experience community as the overarching reason for working or volunteering in the Center, as well as their primary vision of what social justice looks like.

Socialized Mind. In the desire for belonging, students were often looking outside of themselves for validation, orientation, and authority. This is what Kegan (2000) called

the “socialized mind” _ a developmental place where a person’s identity is dependent on an external source. At this level of consciousness, one’s identity is tied to living in relationship with others and a person is subject to the opinion of people in their lives (Davidson, 2011). Acceptance is crucial, since meaning is still found from outside oneself in this stage (Evans et al., 1998). This was prevalent in the students’ preoccupation with a sense of belonging, which they prioritized over engaging issues. A focus on community can come from the fact that losing favor with people is an overriding anxiety in this stage. This also explains students’ hesitance to engage in potential conflict, like their initial avoidance of working the piece from *Unlikely Allies*, as their need to be accepted will come before their commitment to voicing something difficult.

Transitional Knowing. While the direct parallel of Kegan’s socialized mind to Baxter Magolda’s (1992) ways of knowing is “absolute knowledge” (where knowing is certain and a clear and accessible “right” exists), I offer that students predominately entered the research in the stage of *transitional knowing*. With transitional knowing, knowledge is less certain, as reliance on authority is shaken. The “fundamental discovery” that prompts movement from absolute to transitional knowing is that authorities are not all-knowing (p. 182). While this discovery is initiated at different times and through different circumstances for all people, many of our students’ confrontation with sexism or systems of oppression served as an impetus for this shift to transitional knowing. In initiating conversations about social justice, they realized that the models their parents or guardians provided reflected values that did not equally value them as women, or they saw that society was established in a way that favors

certain identities and groups, and their confidence in external authority was called into question, most clearly evidenced in one-on-one advising meetings. In transitional knowing, peers take a more active role. Thus, when the students were discussing belonging, it was less about my supervisor and I, and more about the shared experience of their peers. With transitional knowing, students don't immediately abandon reliance on external authority, but swing between questioning it and relying on it to define their sense of the world (Baxter Magolda, 2009). My transition in my practice to pay attention to my power, then, is an important piece of supporting students' development; encouraging students' involvement in their own decisions and meaning-making is an important factor in fostering development beyond this stage. As knowledge is becoming less and less certain, another key element of transitional knowing is people settling for "what would work best;" in replacement of a "right" answer, they look for the best possible (Baxter Magolda, 1992, ch. 4). With our students who are frequently operating from the socialized mind, community might be the "next best," almost acting as a surrogate to the lost certainty of previous sources of authority.

Dependent/Counter-dependent. Adolescents are typically in a stage of dependence; yet, when this is initially shaken, people are often still bound by external authority, but in opposition to it. This is known as counter-dependence (Parks, 2011). In this stage, people are reacting against the positions of their authorities rather than creating new truths for themselves (Evans et al., 1998). Students' emerging understanding of systems of oppression makes it likely that many of them were grappling with counter-dependence when they arrived at the Center. This is illustrated

by their consistent questioning of authority in their lives_ particularly the pattern of raising issues with what faculty or parents say to them that they perceive to be ignorant to dynamics of sexism. This stage explains the propensity to value relationships above the exploration of social justice, as belonging is still a driving need in terms of how bound people feel to external meaning. This resistance, or oppositionally placed sense of self, could also explain a part of the dynamic of students' inability to hear people once "you guys" came out of their mouth. In their differentiation, they still defined themselves to the authority, but now in opposition to those they used to look to as a source of knowledge.

Believing. In cycle three, students demonstrated a growing belief in their own capacity to create change, as well as an increase in identifying their values. It was also in this cycle that the themes and tension of a new "us versus them" appeared, pointing to the extent to which we were still living from socialized mind, transitional knowing, and counter-dependence, but with an attempt to flee from these frames.

Self-authoring mind. Kegan's (1982) third order of consciousness, the self-authoring mind, moves awareness to a place where life is no longer something that happens to us, but rather is something that we create and are situated in. This speaks to the frame that I was moving into in initiating the research; I was coming to understand my own capacity and power in promoting social justice, and wanted to see myself within the system, thus action-research was a space and methodology to continue to support movement into this stage. Students' learning and dialogue around themselves as social actors reflected their initial engagement with this idea and stage. Self-authorship is

illustrated by the capacity to take responsibility for and ownership of your internal voice and authority (Kegan, 1998). The increasing presence of values in this cycle could point to the beginning cultivation of one's own idea of what social justice is as we developed our own sense of values and ideologies. Additionally, in the shared notes, fewer quotes from my supervisor and me appeared, pointing to less reliance on external hierarchical authority. Though the presence of new values and less occupation with my supervisor and I could be read as movement to self-authorship, the significance of peer influence and cultural pieces around what the Center fosters and rewards leaves room for an interpretation that suggests students are still merely relying on those outside of themselves, perhaps others in the Center, to inform their sense of self.

In the self-authoring mind, relationships are a part of your world rather than your reason for existence (Evans et al., 1998). With the conversation of *La Lucha* and the increased connection to the movements of social justice, students were beginning to situate themselves in the context of relationship while not being reliant on them in the same way we saw in the belonging stage. This shift with students beginning to see themselves in the context of the larger system suggests engagement with patterns of thought that would cultivate movement from life as subject to object (Kegan, 1982).

The struggle to embrace "the other" in terms of those disinterested in social justice is indicative of fragility of their internal voice and budding understanding of their relational needs. Most students were asking questions and developing an internal voice while their complexity in thinking was advancing, yet their reliance on this foundation

was fleeting at best. While there were glimpses of self-truths, this was often timid and patterns of returning to authority outside themselves were frequently present.

Independent thinking. Thinking for oneself is paramount in independent thinking. Thus the rejection of peers_ though rigid_ was a sign that the students were creating their own constructs and ways of assessing the validity of thought. The tension of “us versus them” likely came out of the fact that the primary focus for individual knowers within independent thinking is their own thought, so it can be difficult to carefully listen to others in this stage of development. As people develop their own thought, thinking is categorized by embracing and subordinating thoughts based on one’s own opinion (Baxter Magolda, 1992). This played out in the shared notes interestingly, in that there was less uniformity in the notes, potentially because students were sorting through what aspects they were attracted to and agreed with from what their peers shared.

In this stage, people are finding voice and becoming less afraid of what others think of them, as they trust their own internal foundation (Baxter Magolda, 2009). Some students’ struggle to bring what we discussed outside of the Center pointed to the fact that they are still in the transitional knowing stage. Because the Center’s shared values are more along what was engaged throughout this paper, students may still have been relying on external authority while espousing the same values as those of their peers who were developing an internal voice. One factor that supports the emergence of independent knowing is making stronger connections between academic and personal experiences (Baxter Magolda, 1992). With this, what year students are in school may

have impacted what they were engaging with academically and how it connected to their work, life, and reflection in the Center. The need to think for oneself manifested interestingly in one sophomore student whom I supervised: she decided to take next semester off from working at the Center. She explained that she has spent two years in the Center engaging ideas and now she needs “time and space on my own to reflect on what I think and stand in my values by myself.” She did not yet fully trust her voice, but was wanting to live and stand in it outside of the container the Center provides, thinking for herself, or at least desiring to do so. This student demonstrated an intention to move towards independent thinking.

Inner-dependence. There are two stages within inner dependence: fragile and confident (Evans et al., 1998). Predominantly, glimpses of inner dependence were fragile. The student who wanted to leave the Center demonstrated that she was moving to a place where she did not need the container of the Center in the same way, and desired to stand in her values without it. In fact, she illustrated the core shift in inner dependence: “an awareness of one’s own ability to shape one’s own destiny and life” (Parks, 2011, p. 101). When we saw belief instilled through appreciative inquiry, a shift away from counter-dependence was encouraged. Much like my commentary on defining beauty, the ability to dream of a socially just world outside of the structure that we know is a capacity not bound by opposition to external authority, but rooted in an understanding of self-agency. In this, students are beginning to form, test, and trust their internal voice and do not rely on people in the same way. The hesitation and inability to define such an appreciative vision may indicate stages of dependence:

students frequently indicated that the ways they engage in social justice in a classroom is purely through social critique; thus, the students unable to articulate a vision of justice may be rooted in dependence, where they are being asked a question to which they've never received an answer from an external authority.

Being. Just as actually living in a way that reflects values of social justice is a process and is incredibly challenging, so too are the stages engaged in this section. More than any section before it, entering the stages of the self-transforming mind, contextual knowing, and interdependence is not often achieved, particularly at the age the students participating and myself. For example, less than 1% of the population achieves the self-transforming mind (Evans et al., 1998). As I prefaced, the questions engaged within the final cycles moved us closer in the direction of the later stages. In short, the factors that cultivate such development characterized the stage, not the developmental places themselves. In the *being* stage, we began to engage questions and patterns of thought that, if continued, will promote access to and nurture our growth toward the self-transforming mind, contextual knowing, and interdependence.

Self transforming mind. The core questions of the self transforming mind are: what am I missing?, and how can my outlook be more inclusive?. With these questions, a person takes a step back from the act of self-authoring and holds it as object. This is epitomized in the ability to hold one's life outside yourself for examination and reflection within a larger system. From this point of view, one is able to regard multiple ideologies simultaneously and compare them, being wary of any single one (Kegan, 1998). This is a stage where paradox and complexity are embraced and pursued (Evans

et al., 1998). The students' emphasis on challenging everything and asking questions points to the spheres of attention that would move them closer to this stage. While their and my own continued rigidity and/or struggle to engage with those whose values are not aligned indicated the distance between our developmental places and the stage of self-transforming mind.

Contextual knowing. Contextual knowing is characterized by the ability think for oneself in the context of knowledge generated by others. This comes out of the ability to integrate one's own ideas with others (Baxter Magolda, 1992). This stage is exemplified through applying knowledge in a particular setting (i.e. contextualizing knowing). The conversation around "meeting people, period" was connected to a contextualized way of knowing. Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007) discussed the importance of acknowledging how everyone is hurt by systems of oppression, including those that the system privileges, as a key point in meeting people (p. 166). This approach applies a different read on systems and how they affect people depending on whom you are connecting with, differentiating how people experience oppression while also extending empathy and connection to all. There is an ability to hold paradox in this_ seeing people as simultaneously an oppressor and oppressed. This also is the stage in which you can most clearly see yourself in another while not being collapsed by the other_ as the literature on the construction of mutuality encouraged (Welch, 2002 & Himley, 2004). I rarely can hold this level of complexity, and only saw the need to cut the sentence "meeting people where they are at" with the urge of a validation group member. Similarly, the students did not demonstrate the capacity for integrating

paradoxical thinking into their worldview or critically evaluating and reassessing other's knowledge situationally_ all crucial aspects of this stage (Baxter Magolda, 1992, p.188). Yet, as a collective, we tapped into the need and potential for doing this work. As we shared our inability to hold such tensions, we began to raise our own awareness of our growth edges in this regard, pointing to where we have neglected such complexity, such as in our lack of flexibility around "rules of engagement".

Interdependence. When individuals come to an understanding of themselves that can see another person's perspective without feeling threatened by it, they are in a stage of interdependence (not normally reached until midlife). Parks (2011) described this stage as one that allows for the reemergence of "deep self," what I have been referring to as authentic self. She explained that deep self brings a more profound perception of one's relatedness to others, saying:

This transformation constitutes another qualitative shift in the balance of strength, vulnerability, trust, and faith. Now more at home with both the strengths and limitations of the self, one can be at home with the strengths and limitations of others. A person's center of primary trust is now centered in the meeting of self and other, in the recognition of the strength and finitude of each, and in the promise of *the truth that emerges in relation*. This trust takes the form of a profound, self-aware conviction of interdependence. (p. 112)

Again, this is not a stage I visit often, and my students struggle to get there as well. Yet, our consistent work in asking ourselves what social justice requires raised the need and vision of living in this way. We could only see this place on the horizon, and

heightened our awareness of the ways in which we neglect to live in this space and orientation to relationship.

Initially, I was confused by the emergence of the theme “be present” in the final stage, *being*. Yet, with this framework, I hypothesize that the students emphasis on being present is a call to be present to inner voice, intuition, and personal truth, moving toward the state that Parks (2011) so eloquently described. This is about knowing yourself and expanding your empathic capacity as you grow in your ability to also see yourself in another. This drastically shifts what it is to *ignite*, as the action we are moving toward is not merely about activism, but authenticity. When thinking about the tension of oasis v. transformation through this lens, there is a softer shift in what it means to change campus: opening our hearts and minds to human beings. I saw this in my own awakening that the Center is an experience of immersion in and of itself. As I connected to students and my supervisor in a way that promoted connection to my deep self while acknowledging myself in them, I opened in a poignant way. There is a sort of magic that happens when you connect to another human on a level that can see interconnectedness and interdependence; while I am not living from this stage, my experiences as we discovered deep meaning through dialogue and expression were moments of seeing what could be in terms of human connection.

Journey. In an honest look at the data, we are most consistently in a state of moving from the stage of belonging and reliance on external authority to cultivating belief. While some of the preoccupation with belonging indicates these lower stages of development, Parks’ (2011) work focused on the significance of mentoring communities.

Given this, with intentionality, the Center can serve as a space that serves to support development in its members, as we have seen throughout the research. While the *being* stage is a suggestion, a hope, more than our current reality or stage that hope is one that was shared, co-envisioned, and briefly visited. Our mentoring community, then, is one fostering the worthy dreams and developmental goals of its members. And, as these stages emerged from our data, their natural connection to development theory suggested a healthy environment for development to occur. For me, I became awakened to the potential capacity within, should I continue to attend to my own development.

While social justice learning is framed here as a developmental journey, this hints that the path to social justice is a developmental task. As people come into higher stages of interdependence, contextual knowing, and the self-transforming mind, their ability to hold difference is expanded. The “Other,” then, can become known, while that knowing is no longer a threat to the knowledge and embodiment of self. I posit that self transformed, interdependent contextual knowers would create drastically different social structures than what we see today, and in growing and developing leaders with this capacity for complexity, authenticity, and difference, our collective capacity for justice would greatly expand.

From Process to Practice

The implications of these theoretical connections are multi-tiered in terms of my practice. First, the role of art in our research becomes even more intriguing, as recent research in cognitive neuroscience correlated art based education with human

development (Groff, 2010 & Groff, 2013). Second, Kegan, Baxter Magolda, and Parks all provided direction in terms of promoting development. This literature, then, could provide a fuller picture of what *inviting*, *inquiring*, and *igniting* did (and should) entail, allowing me to assess my practice in terms of how to support student development in identity, values, and embodiment of social justice. Third, the potential connection between development and social justice learning places my personal development as central to my ability to facilitate social justice education.

If realizing social justice relies on human and organizational development at higher levels, then the most significant thing I can dedicate myself to as a social justice educator is personal development. O'Brien said, "the success of an intervention is dependent on the interior condition of the intervener" (Green, 2011, October, personal communication). With this, I can only facilitate learning for my students as far as I have gone or am willing to go. This was clearly demonstrated with the Center being stuck on the dichotomous thinking of getting "it" and not; my capacity to hold complexity shaped my questions and ways that I framed our learning and encountered my students. While Action Research seeks to examine one's practice, this is a call to examine my whole self. To effectively engage social justice learning, I needed to *invite* others into my personal journey, *inquire* and examine my personal growth along developmental lines, and move (*ignite*) to progress on cognitive, social, moral, and spiritual levels. In thinking about my personal growth throughout the research process, I have frequently attended to these areas of development. This, of course, is ongoing work and one that requires an attention to *shadow*.

Shadow Work

Leadership theorist Johnson(2009) discussed how light and shadow coexist within leadership; it is when we neglect to acknowledge the shadow-side of leadership that it can become the most corrupt and destructive. Conversely, cultivating an awareness of the shadows of leadership creates space to explore how to creatively shed light instead.

Social justice is certainly not without this dynamic. As my validation group reviewed the model, they pushed me on how “pretty” it was. In working through this with them, they helped me acknowledge a difficult truth: there is a temptation in social justice work to paint an idyllic picture of the future. Similarly, I have a tendency in my own work to make things neat and to point to the blossoms, potential, and growth without fully owning the missteps, muck, and inconsistency that simultaneously exists. This makes the model’s lotus shape even more appropriate, for beneath the surface of what is presented here is perhaps the bulk of our work (see Figure 9).

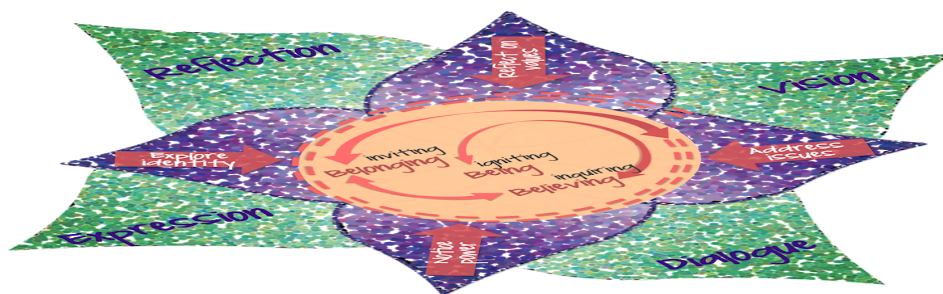


Figure 9: What Lies Beneath. This image symbolizes the lotus nature, and this subconscious within reach just below the model.

From what research shows about the implicit, socialized, and ingrained nature of bias, prejudice, power, and privilege, that which is below the surface must be accessed for change to be realized (Fiske & Lindzey, 2004 & Fiske et al., 2002, Jun, 2010, Massey, 2007, & Steele, 1997,). Without doing this part, unintentional and subconscious behaviors and patterns will continue, which perpetuate the status quo and further social injustice. This is certainly true in my own practice. For example, I encountered a shadow side to all four pillars of our process: (1) identity is not only explored, but also exploited as I either lived into my privilege or neglected to do the internal piece of the work; (2) while I reflected on my values, I also consistently contradicted them in my actions, behavior, and mental frames; (3) when I was not addressing issues_ or even in *how* I addressed them, I perpetuated oppressive dynamics; (4) and I was seduced by and/or abused power just as much as I noticed it. Truly, I have countless examples of how I lived these shadows throughout the research. One of the areas that illustrated this is how I took up and neglected to take up the work around my racial identity. It takes consistent awareness of my white privilege to mitigate unintentional dominance; Table 3 shows a list that McIntosh (2012) provided of thirteen “deadly habits” of oppression that she noticed in herself and other people of dominant groups, and offered some “instead behaviors” (retrieved from Dace, 2012). She explained that these deadly behaviors_ while rewarded and touted when coming from the dominant group_ are assertive, and can be offensive to someone who isn’t identified with authority (p. 96).

Table 3. McIntosh’s Thirteen Deadly Habits

<i>Always being:</i>	<i>Instead behaviors</i>
The Knower	Listening
The Manager	Learning
The Authority	Observing
The Authorizer	Relating
The Judge	Relaxing
The Jury	Reflecting
The Gatekeeper	Consulting
The Challenger	Connecting
The Competition	Settling down
The Speaker	
The Synthesizer	
The Generalizer	
The Clown	

This list helps me point to the shadows of my work in terms of my whiteness. I wish that I had tallied after every meeting, dialogue, or advising session how many of these “always behaviors” I exhibited. Similarly, Pettitt (2007) has a list of ways that we “show up white” as we facilitate and present. Again, I can identify incidents where I exhibited almost every one of her fifty-plus behaviors. These socialized ways of being for me as a White woman are compounded by my positionality as an advisor, the primary researcher, etc. Additionally_ and I am very aware of the fact that I am only now sharing this data_ every student whom I advise and supervise this semester is a woman of Color. Thus, I must consider the impact of my frequent knower, authority, and synthesizer voices (my greatest valences of McIntosh’s list) on my students, the Center, and our experience of the research and our learning. Not only that, but the extent to which I have engaged in this work and the theory behind it is a function of my education, and socio-economic status. Therein lie the shadows. When I do not engage these questions, I am not exploring my privileged identities and am instead exerting

racial and class dominance on others. In this, I contradicted my espoused values of justice and instead perpetuated racial oppression, while relying on, if not abusing, my power and positionality. One specific example of this is the incident that I shared about jumping to the board to map out a theory for the students. My tendency toward an instructor role embedded in a system of racial oppression and white supremacy has implications far beyond my observations of power offered in the first cycle.

Some of my interventions sought to address the shadow side of my own practice. Yet, with maybe the exception of our second dialogue about *Unlikely Allies*, this was not raised to the group as a whole. What I am saying is, though I attended to some shadow on an individual level in my personal reflection, we did not engage this in our collective action research process. There is an inverse to belonging, believing and being that the shadow of our pillars contribute to, which we did not discover because of our neglect to attend to shadow work. Again, from what we know of the psychological effects and nature of injustice, our attention must move toward the subconscious, implicit, and embedded power dynamics which connect us to ourselves as oppressors. I feel as if this is a whole new action research proposal, one that looks at the ways in which the forces of power and privilege that we critique are alive within, recognizing that even our “oasis” is not fully safe. We are not immune to oppressive dynamics and power structures, and are hurting ourselves by neglecting to engage this reality. We must learn to look within with equal, if not greater, rigor than what we bring to our social critique. While my research posed the question, how do we engage social justice learning, these realizations raised for me other questions:

- How did we neglect to engage, experience, and enact social justice?
- What norms have we established that hinder us from doing the work of sitting in the discomfort of social justice and surfacing our shadows?
- What assumptions did we leave untouched?
- Am I more committed to painting a pretty picture_ having a nice looking model_ or creating, initiating, and living deep change?

Attending to these questions will deepen our practice and transform the way in which we know and be in the world.

One tension for me throughout the research was the extent to which I shared with students my learning and reflection that guided my change in action throughout each cycle. I was attentive enough to my power and voice that I tried to carry myself in a way that created space for the students' thoughts and ideas to emerge without my biases framing our exploration. With this, I did not share some of my personal reflection so not to influence the findings in a way that they would merely validate what I offered (a warranted concern given what we know about student development and authority). However, as I sit with the limitations of this research in regards to shadow work, I must ask myself: in not sharing my personal reflection, how was I "protecting us," (i.e. hindering us) from delving into the more difficult pieces of social justice?

A participatory process to engage the questions above would provide greater insight and understanding of our model's shadow side. What I offer below is not co-created, but merely a suggestion of this side based on my observations, experience,

and perspective throughout the research. I suggest that the inverse of belonging, believing, and being is a cycle of isolation, idolatry, and insularity, see Figure 10.

This process is perhaps best exemplified in the myth that social justice is something to “get.” *Isolation* is rooted in an individualistic and egocentric frame where the way that I see it is the “right” way. *Idolatry* is the attachment to this personal understanding. So, not only is my understanding of social justice “right,” it is the only acceptable perspective and I am wholly committed to it, perhaps even putting that specific spin or lens before overarching themes, values, and purpose. *Insularity* is the closing in on oneself, often manifesting in a disinterest in communities who see things other than the way that I do, and who have the same idols that I hold.

For me, understanding privilege is a concept that sends me tumbling down this spiral. I believe that isms exist and that we must become aware of where we fall within privilege and oppression to begin to confront the way in which we all are complicit in these systems. With this, when I perceive someone to be of privilege in a social identity, and do not perceive them being aware of said privilege in the way that I communicate my awareness of my own privilege, I construct them as an “Other” who does not “get it,” and who is separate from me. Then, I idolize my personal version of acknowledging privilege and, in my frustration with how “unlike me” (i.e. not down) they are, I desire to only surround myself with people who do their work in the way that I do. I share this to demonstrate the pitfalls and shadow just beneath the 3 B’s and learning in which our research primarily explored.

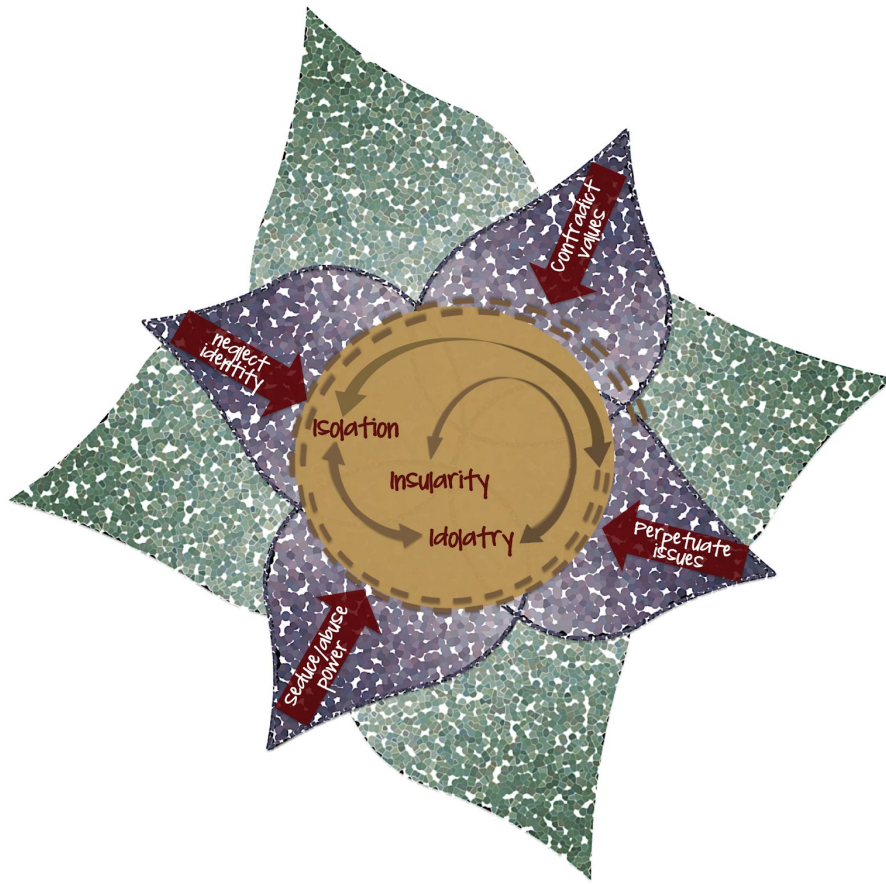


Figure 10: Shadow of Social Justice Learning Model. This image represents the shadow side of the model.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Out of our exploration, a model of social justice learning emerged that could provide a helpful framework for others engaged in the work of social justice education. What is left to be explored further are the connections to human development and this pursuit, as well as the shadow and subconscious process that parallels the model. In closing, I will offer recommendations for the Center and social justice educators as a whole.

Recommendations

For the Center

For the Women's Center, the model provides a framework for how to continue our learning. As the discussion indicated, there are two areas for further exploration that come out of our work. The first is to continue to pay attention to the relationship between social justice learning and student development. Second, and most importantly, to be diligent in surfacing and attending to the shadow side of social justice, our organization, and leadership. As I prepare to complete my contract and time at the Center, my biggest recommendation is to continue doing the important work that you are doing, both as a Center and in all areas of your lives, and to believe in the power and strength of voice.

For Practitioners/Learners

For other practitioner-learners, I hope that you consider what could be cultivated in students, world, and ourselves if this model and work was our image of learning and development. For those interested in implementing or continuing work along this vein, I point you to my reflection on my practice and interventions, the framing questions, and shadow section for areas that provide insight and direction. Mostly, from what I have learned, I would say to begin to explore or better engaged social justice, ask your students and allow them to lead the learning.

As I said when I opened, I share our journey not because we have discovered “answers” to the question of how to do this work. Instead, I offer that it is our questions that are of the greatest value, for they chart a journey of learning and self-discovery, and on this journey, clarity will emerge as you connect to your own authenticity.

For my Future

When I enrolled in the research course that introduced Action Research methodology to me, we began by a conversation around values. I had the opportunity to participate in a “values sort” exercise where I narrowed down a long list of values to discern the ones I hold most dear. My top three were love, peace, and justice. While that is a nice list, the potential exists for these to be rather esoteric concepts that float “out there,” without a firm grounding in application or connection to my daily life; in short, they are big, and can feel intangible at times. Thus, for me, this was a journey in which I interrogated how I understand justice, and how that understanding informs the way in which I live my life. Through consistent inquiry and reflection, I moved toward a space of attempting just-Relationship_ seeking to love, humanize, and see myself in

every human being whom I encounter, and uprooting the ways in which I neglect to do this. What a relief, then, that this is a *process*. As I engaged in my research questions, I think that the *pursuit* of justice became woven into the fiber of my being, so_ while I misstep frequently_ I have a more clear vision of who I want to be and what I want to create.

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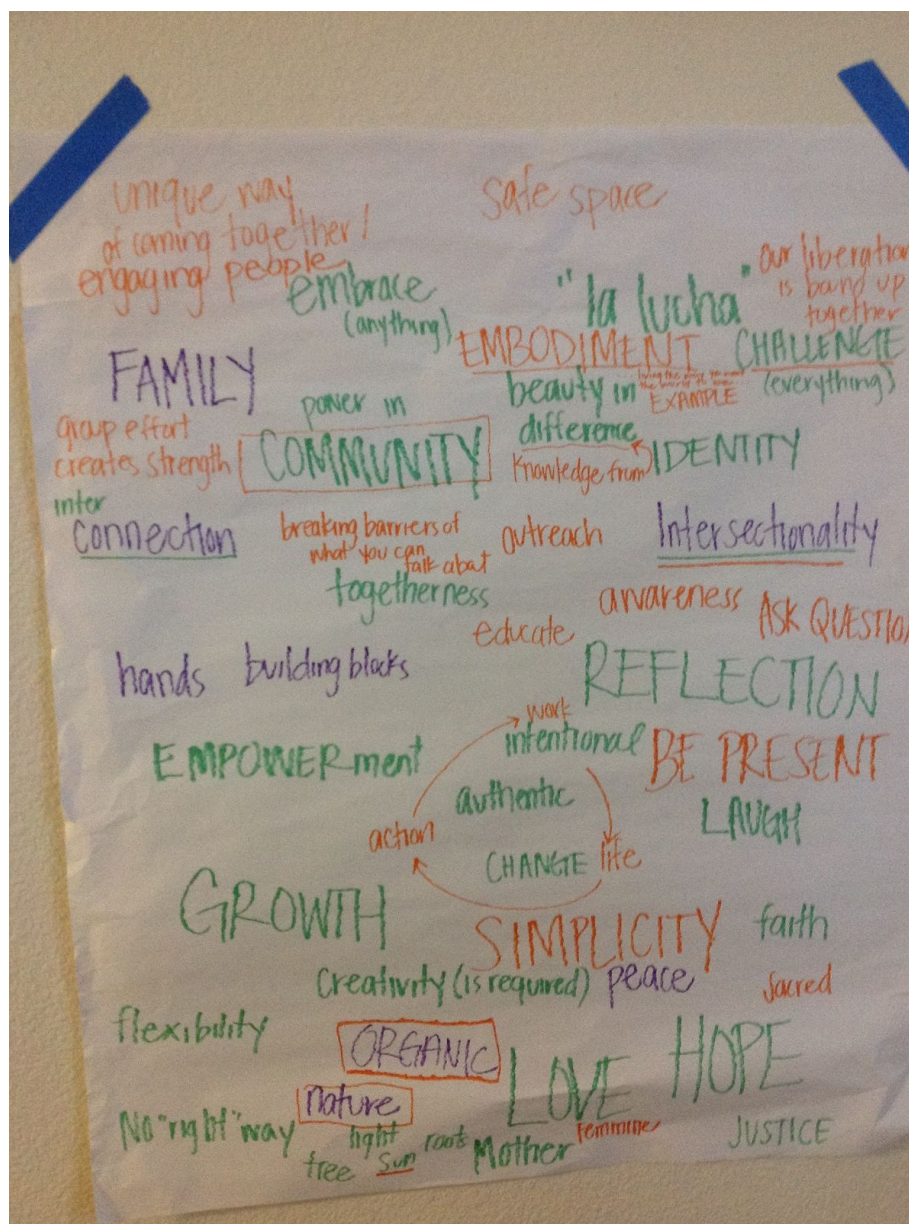
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Appendix A: Mind Map of Cycles & Themes



Appendix B: Quote Activity in Training



Appendix C: Values List



Appendix D: Initial Personal Visions



Appendix F: Shared Notes from Personal Visioning



Appendix G: Gallery

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Appendix J: Shared Notes from Final Cycle

